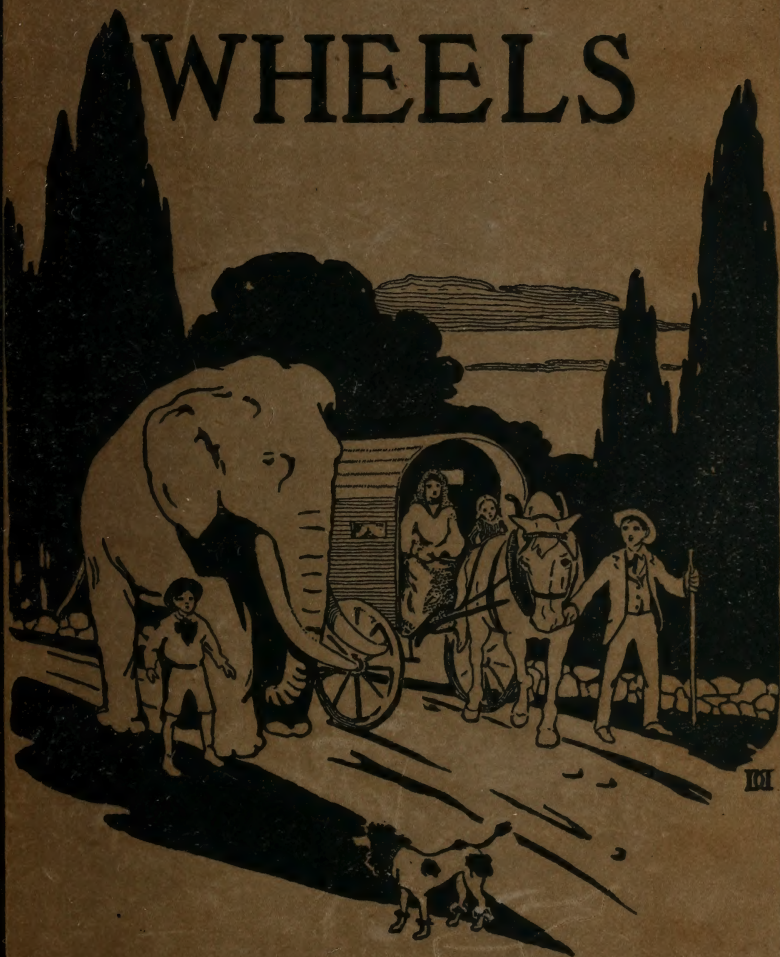


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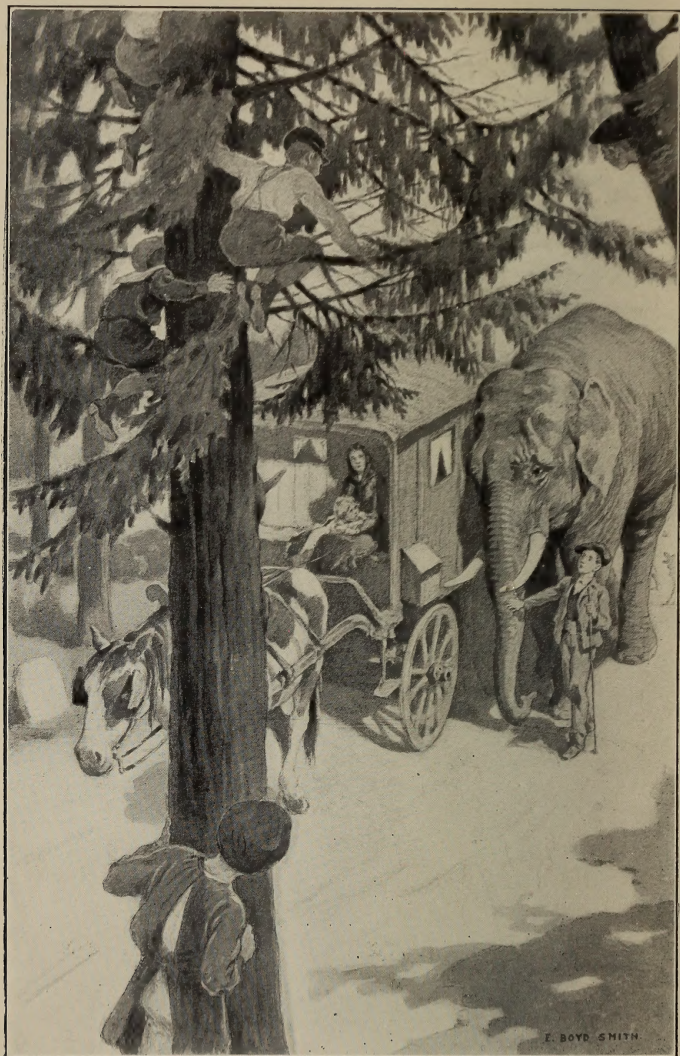
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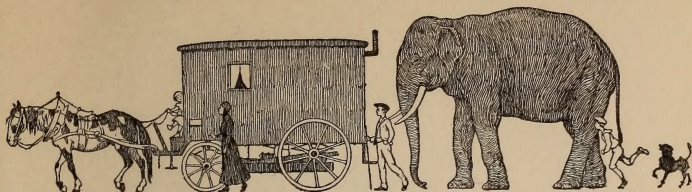
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“YOU NEEDN’T BE AFRAID,” CALLED OUT THE BOY.



THE FAMILY ON WHEELS

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH BY

J. MACDONALD OXLEY

*Author of "The Boy Tramps" and
"The Romance of Commerce"*



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THE FAMILY ON WHEELS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING THE FAMILY.

“ONE! two! right! left! one! two! Number Three, you are not in line. Forward a little! That’s it. Now then—one! two! right! left!”

It was early morning of a midsummer day, and a dozen or more boys, between the ages of ten and fifteen, marched out of the market town of Morainville, some armed with wooden swords, and others with broom-handles which did service as rifles, while the most of them were eating big slices of bread with keen relish.

“One! two! right! left!”

The time of the annual fête, when the soldiers would come, was drawing near, and for several days the youngsters of the place had been preparing to receive them in fitting manner.

All their usual forms of play had for the nonce been abandoned in favor of drilling, and grave

councils of war, and much attention was given to the making of wooden swords and guns wherewith to more closely imitate the soldiers.

Then came the important matter of choosing the officers, which, however, were always the same, because the smaller boys never failed to vote for the bigger ones, knowing well that if they didn't they would assuredly get a licking.

A couple of boys in the party had a special talent for imitating the trumpet by placing their shut hand over their closed lips, and these led the little troop.

By eight o'clock the children had marched over a mile, and reached the top of a hill planted with spruce trees on both sides of the road which slanted sharply in front and rear of their route.

The captain of the company ordered a halt, and as their young legs were pretty tired, it was decided that they should there await the arrival of the soldiers.

A sentinel was placed on the road to report the appearance of the regiment in good time to allow the boys to get ready for its reception.

Half-an-hour later, as the little soldiers of the wooden swords waited beneath the spruce trees, the sentinel from his post of observation gave the signal.

“Hurrah! there they are!” cried the boys delightedly, and they made haste to draw up in line along the road.

But it was not the regiment that came in view. No red trousers showed upon the horizon. Nothing save a big lumbering wagon, a mountebank’s van drawn by a single horse, made its appearance, moving in the direction of the town.

Yet the sight of this solitary van would not of itself have sufficed to attract the curiosity of the children. Strolling performers! why, they were nothing uncommon. They visited the town often in the course of the year, and one poor shabby van could never have constituted a counter-attraction to the most insignificant soldier in his red trousers.

Nevertheless the youngsters stood there upon the road like statues, and, after their first exclamation of surprise, they were silent also, while their eyes fairly bulged from their sockets as they gazed open-mouthed upon that which was coming towards them.

Beside the van moved the huge bulk of something unknown that stalked solemnly along, looking neither to right nor left.

What could it be? So tremendous a creature had never crossed their vision before.

“Can it be a beast?” whispered one of the boys with trembling lips.

“Why—yes—” responded the captain, making a gallant effort to appear unconcerned, although he was greatly excited, “a beast that can walk.”

It was, indeed, bewildering. A monster beside which the horse that drew the van seemed no bigger than a dog—a monster whose height exceeded that of the mountebank’s house on wheels.

Then to one of the boys came an inspiration, and he cried proudly :

“I know what it is. I saw the picture of one in a book my father was showing me. It’s an elephant !”

“What a whopper ! an elephant’s not a great brute like that. You don’t know what you’re talking about,” snapped the captain, ill-pleased at a private having ventured an explanation of the wonder.

This silenced the youngster, and as none of the others could offer any better suggestion the little company, feeling decidedly nervous, made haste to climb the trees that lined the road just as the mountebanks and their elephant reached the top of the hill. Like a band of frightened monkeys they got among the branches uttering cries of fear, and then, with the effrontery of monkeys,

took their positions as close as possible to the road so that they might obtain a full view of the strolling performers, and of the wonderful animal that sauntered so peacefully along beside their conveyance.

“You needn’t be afraid,” called out one of the mountebanks reassuringly. He was only a boy himself, and his keen eyes had taken in the situation at a glance. “There’s no harm in Nalla. He wouldn’t hurt anybody unless they hurt him first.”

And as he spoke the lad stroked lovingly the trunk of the great creature that responded to the caress with little grunts of satisfaction.

At this assurance all the boys descended from their refuge in the trees, and in a gingerly hesitating fashion, for they were still a little nervous, drew near the boy who was so manifestly in the good graces of the monster.

What puzzled the boys was that they saw no sign of either the father or mother of the little players, of whom there were four, two boys and two girls.

On the front platform of the van sat a girl of not more than sixteen, holding in her lap another of about five years of age.

“Come now—Steady—hurry up!” cried the latter to the horse.

“Oh ! let him alone ! he’s going as fast as he can, Lydia,” said the elder one. “It’s no use shouting at him.”

But Steady did not mend his pace. He well deserved his name, for indeed a slower animal never wore harness.

Behind the van came another youngster, not more than ten years old, followed by a black dog clipped so as to faintly resemble a lion. The boy and dog were evidently on the best of terms, and the one no less full of life than the other.

It goes without saying that the whole party of boys, who had come out to receive the soldiers, completely forgot them in the novelty of this strange party, and constituted themselves a guard of honor for Nalla and his friends without giving another thought to the red trousers which had been the original cause of their early morning march-out.

At the entrance of the town was a sort of open square formed by the joining of two roads, and it was there that the owners of the van, the Tamby family, had taken their stand when the expected soldiers, with fife and drums leading, at last marched into Morainville.

As they watched them pass, looking very im-

posing indeed in all their martial splendor, little Cæsar Tamby said to Nadine his sister :

“The soldiers ! We have got here in the nick of time. We ought to take in a lot of money to-night.”

But Nadine, whose pretty features wore a sad expression, shook her head doubtfully :

“Who can tell ?” she murmured. “Perhaps the Mayor won’t allow us to give a performance.”

She was going to find out, and she took with her the necessary papers to make a formal request for the authorization.

Nadine, the eldest of the Tamby family, who undertook the always tiresome, and often troublesome task of securing the necessary permission for the little troupe to make a stay within the bounds of a commune, and give public performances, set off with no loss of time.

She quickly made her way to the center of the town where the Mayor’s office was situated, but there encountered a lot of soldiers receiving directions from their officers in regard to their stay at Morainville. It was accordingly with some difficulty that she was able to reach the office of the Mayor, which was crowded with officers who were engaging his attention.

His worship was informed that a mountebank

wished to see him about obtaining permission to make a stay in the town.

“I’ve no time to waste upon such folk, and, moreover, I won’t give the permission because the soldiers are here,” was his ungracious reply as conveyed to the anxious Nadine by the constable, who, noting her disappointment, added in a kinder tone on his own account :

“My young girl, the Mayor won’t see you, and as he has given his answer to your request you may take my word for it that it’s useless for you to wait about here. You’d better push on to some other town where you’ll have a chance to give a performance.”

“But, sir,” pleaded Nadine, her lip trembling, and her fine eyes filling with tears, “if we don’t perform this evening we shall have nothing to eat to-morrow. We might get along somehow ourselves, but our animals, they must be fed.”

The constable was touched by her plea, and the charm of her simple manner.

“Very well, then,” he responded, laying his big hand upon her shoulder in a fatherly way. “You’ll have to try and see the Mayor at his own house,” and the kind-hearted fellow gave Nadine directions how to find it, and what to do when she got there.

The Mayor's residence was quite a castle, and Nadine felt very timid about venturing to enter it, but she found the great portal open, and glided through without being observed by any one in the establishment, the fact of the matter being that on this day everybody had their hands too full to concern themselves about who might be going or coming.

The staff of domestics seemed to be exceedingly busy. Several women in snow-white dresses were hard at work before the cooking range, one of them giving orders in a sharp voice, and the others replying promptly :

“ Yes, Madame Françoise,” and carrying out her instructions.

A moment later Madame Françoise caught sight of Nadine who stood shyly in the doorway, not daring to enter a place where everybody was so engrossed with their work.

“ Who are you, and what do you want ? ” she demanded in a tone of irritation as she fixed her eyes on the young girl, and examined her from her head to her feet. “ Where did you come from ? ” she snapped.

“ Madame,” replied Nadine in a low-toned voice, letting her head drop upon her breast. “ I came to see the Mayor, and to beg——”

“ No—no—we’ve no time for beggars to-day,” cried Madame impatiently, “ and the Mayor won’t be able to see you. Be off with you as quick as you can ! ”

Nadine turned to leave with heavy heart when a door on the other side of the kitchen opened suddenly, and a lady of middle age, in a rich silk gown, entered the room. She was tall and handsome, and her expression was so sweet and pleasant that somehow Nadine’s hopes began to revive.

“ Was it you, Françoise, who spoke so sharply to the child ? ” she asked in a tone that expressed both surprise and reproof.

“ Well, Madame,” replied the servant, “ you see this is one of those little beggars, a mountebank’s daughter, who pay a visit to the town just for what they can steal. She came here begging and I told her that you had no time to attend to her.”

The color flew to Nadine’s face, and her eyes flashed with indignation at these words which were no less unjust than they were cruel.

She lifted her pretty head with a touch of pride, and her voice rang out clearly as she hastened to say :

“ But I didn’t come here begging, Madame. I’ve never had to do anything of the kind yet, thank God. I simply came to ask permission of

the Mayor to make my living in an honest way. That's what I'm here for, I assure you," and she made a respectful courtesy to the lady.

"But why didn't your father come instead, my child?" asked the lady, regarding her with a look of kindly interest. "You are very young to be attending to such matters."

"Alas, I have no longer a father," responded Nadine, her head drooping again, and the big tears welling up in her blue eyes.

"Well, then, your mother—Why does not she come?" was the next question.

Poor Nadine's voice almost failed her, and her answer was scarcely audible :

"I have no mother either."

"What! neither mother nor father!" exclaimed the lady, throwing up her white hands with a gesture of astonishment and pity. "Do you mean to say that you are all alone at your age?"

Nadine lifted her head again, and a new light came into her fine eyes. They glowed with both love and pride as she said :

"No, Madame, I'm not alone. I have two brothers, and a little sister, but they are all much younger than I, so I have to look after the business."

CHAPTER II.

A GOOD FRIEND IN NEED.

MADAME PRADERE, the Mayor's wife, regarded Nadine with deep interest. Although she had much to occupy her time and thoughts that morning, the situation the young girl had so simply disclosed was so unusual as to command her attention to the exclusion of other concerns.

Nadine seemed no less modest and refined than she was pretty, and her big blue eyes, which contrasted strangely with her black and curly hair, bore so sweet an expression that she must manifestly be something altogether different from the strolling players with their bold hard looks, rough voices, and shabby finery, which were wont to come to the village. Dressed plainly in a black calico gown, and having a thin black shawl over her head, she certainly had every appearance of simplicity and honesty. She was undoubtedly poor, but her poverty was of that proud kind which does not seek to inspire pity, but bravely fends for itself, asking alms of nobody.

"My child," said Madame Pradère, in a tone so

full of kindness that Nadine's heart grew warm, and she felt that the way out of her difficulties was beginning to open, "the Mayor has not returned, and may not be back for a while yet ; but however busy he may be he shall spare you a minute, and if he thinks it all right he'll grant you the permission you seek. Come with me," she added signing to Nadine to follow her. "You can wait for him in another room, for the kitchen is in confusion, and you may be in the way of the servants, who have a great deal to do."

Nadine followed Madame Pradère into a little parlor tastefully furnished, where there were ever so many pretty things that called forth her admiration.

But she had too much sense to betray any indiscreet curiosity. Seating herself upon the chair the mistress of the house indicated, she made haste to express her gratitude.

"You are very kind, Madame, very kind indeed," she murmured.

"Not at all, my child, not at all," was the response. "But now tell me, you seek permission from the Mayor to stay here a while in order to sell some little articles I presume ?"

"No, Madame. We have nothing to sell," replied Nadine, gaining courage from the good

lady's gentle manner. "We are only strolling performers who give public representations with our animals."

"Oh ! ho ! you have animals ! Trained dogs, I suppose, and that sort of thing," and Madame's comely countenance expressed an amused interest.

"We have only one dog, Vigilant, who is very comical. He knows how to make the most morose people laugh when he plays his part with Nalla." Nadine's eyes brightened at the thought of her dog.

"Nalla ! and pray who is Nalla ?"

"Madame," answered Nadine, her face growing serious again, "Nalla is our breadwinner. He is the chief attraction of our troupe, for you can easily understand that such mere children as we are daren't pretend to be of much account as performers. In us by ourselves the public would take very little interest, and we couldn't get along at all. But when we exhibit Nalla in all the streets, and make our announcements from his back, curiosity is aroused, and the people come in the evening to see our big creature's performance."

"What do you mean ?" exclaimed Madame Pradère, looking puzzled. "Your big creature ! Is not Nalla, then, a dog like Vigilant ?"

“Oh, no,” cried Nadine, smiling, and fully appreciating the interest she was creating. “Nalla isn’t a dog. Nalla couldn’t get into this big house, Nalla”—and she paused a moment so as to emphasize the announcement, “Nalla is an elephant!”

“An elephant, do you say? Is it possible? How do you happen to own so costly an animal? Why, it must be worth a small fortune!” And as she poured out these questions Madame Pradère scrutinized the girl with a certain air of perplexity, for to her the idea of possessing an elephant seemed hardly consistent with actual poverty.

Nadine understood the look, and her pale cheek flushed slightly.

“I told you, Madame, Nalla is our breadwinner,” she said with a touch of apology in her tone. “But he is also more than that. He is our protector since our father died.”

Madame Pradère’s expression at once changed to one of sympathy.

“Is it long since you lost your parents?” she asked, adding with a kindly smile: “I may seem to be very inquisitive, but the fact is you interest me deeply, and I would like you to tell me your history. In the first place, what is your name?”

“Here are my papers, Madame,” responded Nadine, holding out an old portfolio carefully wrapped up in a bit of silk. “They will tell you all about me.”

“Oh no,” said the Mayoress, gently pushing back the portfolio. “You can show that presently to my husband, but for myself I prefer to hear your story from your own lips.”

Thus encouraged Nadine proceeded in her own clear simple way.

“My name is Nadine Tamby. My elder brother bears the same name as was my father’s, Cæsar. The second boy is named Abel, and my little sister, who is now just six years old, has our mother’s name, Lydia.”

At the mention of the name of Lydia Madame Pradère’s countenance suddenly grew sad, and she gave a sigh that indicated sorrowful memories. In truth it had been the name of a little daughter that once brought joy into her life for a while, and then was taken from her, leaving a void that could never be filled.

Nadine meanwhile continued her narration.

“Our mother died four years ago when we were in the Tyrol, but it is only six months since we lost our father. He died of consumption after being sick for a long time.”

Nadine's voice sank so low as to be scarcely audible, and the big tears moistened her cheeks so that she was fain to wipe them away with her handkerchief. Her parents had always been good and kind, and the pain of their loss was still acute.

“You poor little woman !” murmured Madame Pradère, in whose own eyes the tears were glistening, “and you are the little mother to the others now.”

She was more deeply moved by what she had heard than she cared to show, and in order to conceal her emotion she continued to ply Nadine with questions which the latter answered so clearly and correctly that the Mayoress could not understand a young strolling player being so well educated.

Had she only known the girl's parents she would not have been so puzzled. Cæsar Tamby and his wife were of respectable descent, and had always been true to their parentage in spite of the many temptations to which their mode of life exposed them. They had brought their children up with the utmost care possible in view of their roving life, and during the winter season, when it was not possible to give their performances, they had taken pains to teach them quite as much

as they would have learned by attending the country school, for they were both well educated themselves.

Thus the Tamby children, although their business was appearing in public and giving performances to crowds that too often were by no means considerate of their feelings, nevertheless remained honest, simple, and refined in a remarkable degree.

“And your father,” continued Madame Pradere, “was he always—” here she hesitated a moment, and then finished the sentence with the polite word—“an artist?”

“Yes, Madame,” replied Nadine. “His father was the manager of a circus in which he employed his five sons, of whom my father was the youngest. But on the death of my grandfather, and a series of misfortunes which followed it, the circus was broken up and everything sold with the exception of Nalla, and Steady, which fell to my father.”

“Steady!” exclaimed Madame Pradere. “Who is that? I know Nalla and Vigilant, but you haven’t mentioned Steady before. Is he a clever animal like Nalla, or a comic one like Vigilant?”

“He is an animal that is as gentle as a sheep, and as good as can be,” smiled Nadine. “Steady

is an old horse, who was once upon a time quite a celebrity, but who having become very old, a little deaf, and somewhat blind, is now fit only to drag the van, which is our home on wheels. All the same he is a very true friend, and we love him dearly for he does us good service. Steady was given his name by my mother who was an *equestrienne*, and who always mounted him with confidence because his regular movements made her performance so easy. And now, Madame," Nadine concluded with a naïve smile of apology for having talked so much, "I've told you about our whole family."

Just then Madame Pradère heard the sound of a carriage rolling into the courtyard. She sprang up briskly and looked out of the window.

"That's the Mayor returning!" she said. "Wait here a few minutes while I speak to him about you," and giving the girl an encouraging smile, she left the room.

It was, indeed, the Mayor, accompanied by several officers who had been invited to lunch with him. These were former companions of M. Pradère, who had once been a lieutenant in the army, and had retired upon making a brilliant marriage, which rendered him independent. So there were great doings in the chateau.

Nadine with much concern heard the clinking of the swords, and the most appetizing smell of the extra cooking reminded her that the Tamby children had not yet had any breakfast that day, while the permission to perform that she had come to obtain was still in doubt. If it were not granted there was a poor prospect of food for either the family or their animals. Oppressed by these disturbing thoughts she sat there in an attitude of deep dejection.

She was a young thing to be charged with such heavy responsibilities, and not a day passed that she did not keenly feel her youth and weakness. Yet before the other children her brave spirit never seemed to flag, or her resolution to falter, As she had to be both mother and father to them, she strove gallantly to fill her difficult part to the very best of her powers, and in truth it was nothing short of wonderful how well she succeeded. Still there were times when it seemed as if her burdens were becoming too heavy to be longer borne by her.

Meanwhile Madame Pradère had conducted her guests into the big dining-room which opened upon a spacious veranda whence there spread a broad green lawn reaching to the river's edge.

When all were seated at the table she turned

to her husband with a bewitching smile, and said :

“Your worship, I have a great favor to ask of you.”

“Madame, that favor is granted in advance of its being asked,” replied her husband with a gallant bow, and a look of unmistakable pride and affection, for his wife was a beautiful woman, and greatly admired by all who knew her.

“And my request applies to Colonel Laurier as well as to you,” continued Madame, fixing her fine eyes upon the officer, who at once bowed in his turn, and hastened to say :

“I assure you, Madame, it will give me great pleasure to do anything you wish.”

“I understand, Colonel,” Madame went on after acknowledging his prompt assurance with a gracious smile, “that your soldiers have taken complete possession of the market-place.”

“They have, Madame,” responded the Colonel, considerably puzzled to guess what she was driving at. “There are so many of them, you know, that they require a lot of room.”

“Yes, of course, I quite understand that,” said Madame, her handsome features expressive of a gay resolution that was immensely becoming. “But do you know I shall need a part of the place

this evening for a very fine performance, and I suppose you will be able to make room for the time."

Colonel Laurier was about to accede at once when the Mayor broke in hurriedly, and not altogether politely :

"Those mountebanks again ! Have you them in your mind, my dear ? But it is simply out of the question to-day. I could not think of granting them permission to perform in the market-place. You forget that there are two thousand soldiers there, and that it is my duty to guard against the occurrence of any trouble."

"That is the very reason I am doing this, your worship, and why the assistance of Colonel Laurier and his officers will be so helpful," persisted Madame, flashing her irresistible smiles from one to the other.

"Pray command us. We are certainly at your service," responded the officers in chorus.

CHAPTER III.

THE TAMBY FAMILY IN PUBLIC.

HAVING thus prepared the way very skillfully, Madame Pradère, radiant at the prosperous progress of her enterprise, now revealed her purpose.

“I am very anxious,” she said with a charming glance over all her attentive listeners, “to be present at the performance this evening, and I make bold, gentlemen, to beg of you to be present also. In that way all chance of anything amiss occurring will be avoided.”

“But you do not forget, Madame,” put in the Colonel, “that our being present will mean the absence of the soldiers, who could not sit with us without a breach of discipline.”

“Oh! that will be all right, I promise you, Colonel,” responded Madame archly. “There’ll be no interference with discipline. The soldiers will be placed at the back, and in the front there will be seats reserved for the officers and ourselves.”

Madame Pradère showed a spirit of irresistible pleasantry through it all. She was evidently delighted at having gained the cause of little Nadine, who was so anxiously awaiting the result in the adjoining room.

“And now, gentlemen,” concluded Madame, “will you permit me to present to you the chief of my troupe, who is just here, and whom I don’t want to keep waiting any longer?”

“By all means, Madame,” responded the officers. “It will give us much pleasure.”

The servant, Françoise, was accordingly directed to bring in Nadine.

“Madame is carried away by these mountebanks,” growled Françoise as she went back to the kitchen after doing as she had been bid. “It’s enough for these strolling players to have children to get her interest ever since she lost her own.”

Nadine, blushing and bewildered, stood in the door of the dining-room where Françoise had left her. The brilliant company of officers, the sumptuous table decorated with plants and flowers, and laden with dainties such as she had never in her life tasted, and the whole richness of the room, took her breath away, so to speak, and she could not lift her eyes from the floor.

“Don’t be dismayed, my child !” said Madame kindly, quite understanding the cause of Nadine’s confusion. “Come forward, and give your papers to the Mayor, whom you see there.”

Nadine shyly glided up to his worship, and handed him the papers which she took with great care out of the old battered portfolio.

“Do you mean to say that this is the chief of your troupe, Madame ?” asked the Colonel in a tone that betrayed surprise and skepticism.

“Yes, Colonel Laurier,” Madame replied with a smile of amusement. “That child is the eldest of four, having two brothers and a sister to whom she has been a little mother for the last six months, since they became orphans through the death of their father. She has to attend to all matters of business besides caring for the little ones that are really dependent upon her.”

“She is certainly very pretty,” murmured one of the captains as he twirled his mustache. Even if his gracious hostess had not already bespoken his presence he would certainly have attended the performance in the evening, for Nadine was worth a second look.

“Madame,” remarked the Colonel with a gesture that implied he was entirely convinced, “your protégés are decidedly interesting, and

we shall assuredly be delighted to accompany you to the performance this evening which I am sure will be most entertaining."

Meanwhile the Mayor had been quickly glancing over the papers which Nadine had handed him.

"These are all in order," he said with an important air, "I shall grant the required permission if you will be good enough, Colonel, to give orders to your men to make room for these people."

"That will be done at once," responded Colonel Laurier, and so, thanks to the intervention of the kind lady of the house, the whole matter was satisfactorily arranged.

By this time Nadine had completely regained her spirits, and, before taking her leave, she said in a voice that was made all the sweeter by the deep feeling which its trembling betrayed while she bent low in a graceful courtesy :

"On behalf of my little sister and brothers, I thank you, gentlemen, from the bottom of my heart, and as for myself, I am your most dutiful servant."

Formal as the words sounded they were manifestly sincere, but even more heartfelt were those she added, when, turning toward Madame Pra-

dère, she exclaimed, as she fixed her fine eyes upon the gracious lady :

“ You have been so kind to me, Madame, I cannot express my thanks,” and then she glided from the room.

The moment she reached the street she set off at the top of her speed to rejoin the other children. She knew how impatiently they would be awaiting her return, particularly as the question of food for themselves and their animals hung upon her success.

Cæsar was the first to catch sight of her, and one glimpse of her radiant countenance was enough to tell him that all was well.

“ You have obtained the permission, haven’t you, Nadine ? ” he cried, so soon as she came within hearing.

“ Yes, Cæsar,” she panted joyfully. “ It’s all right, and we can give a performance this evening, when we must do our very best, for we are going to have some important people present ; ” and the other two having joined them she proceeded to tell them all about her good fortune at the Mayor’s house, and the kindness of Madame Pradere.

They listened with sparkling eyes and many exclamations of wonder and delight. Nadine

certainly had a keenly interested and appreciative audience.

“ And now, Cæsar,” she concluded, “ you must go to the market and buy some nice fresh hay for Nalla and Steady.”

“ But that will take our last cent, and what about our own food ?” protested Cæsar, who had the sharp appetite of a growing boy.

“ Oh ! we’ll just have to wait,” replied Nadine decisively. “ But Nalla and Steady must be attended to.”

As she spoke Nalla moved towards his young mistress, and caressed her with his pliant trunk, making at the same time a curious deep sound that somewhat resembled the purring of a giant cat.

“ Yes—you old dear—you shan’t go hungry even if we have to for a little while. You’re our good faithful breadwinner, aren’t you ?” and she patted the thick soft trunk with her pretty hand.

Cæsar grumbled a little, but did as he was bid. Nadine’s rule was as firm as it was gentle, and, however the others might at times object, she rarely failed to have her own way in the end.

So the elephant and the horse were soon enjoying a hearty meal of succulent hay to which they did full justice.

A little later the whole party arrived at the market-place where they found a place made ready for them by the orders of Colonel Laurier, who had not forgotten his promise.

Here Nadine found the gendarme who had been so civil to her in the morning.

“Young girl,” said he courteously, “I am to show you the place where you can give your performance, and also to give you Madame Pradère’s instructions. So first of all tell me how you are accustomed to set up your outfit.”

“Oh, that is a very simple affair,” responded Nadine with an apologetic smile. “We have, you see, our stage,” and she pointed to a few planks and trestles which were hung at the sides and underneath the van. “But we have to hire some planks to serve as seats, and these we arrange in a sort of half-circle leaving plenty of room in the center for Nalla to go through his performance.”

“So, so!” said the gendarme, shaking his head sagely; “that would be well enough for other occasions, but this time you will not hire any planks. There will have to be better arrangements made, for you are going to be honored with a very brilliant audience,” and he pursed up his mouth in a most impressive way,

“for whom mere planks would never do at all, and so for the front rows there must be chairs, and very good chairs too!”

“But, sir!” cried Nadine, appalled at the idea of the expense involved in providing such accommodation, “we can’t do that! We have no money to pay for chairs!”

“Don’t you worry about that, little one,” returned the kindly gendarme, placing his hand upon her shoulder in a fatherly way. “Leave it all to me. I have my orders from Madame Pradère, and shall see that everything is done just as she wishes. Unharness your horse, set up your stage, and let me attend to the rest.”

Nadine was puzzled, but the fact that Madame Pradère had instructed the old gendarme calmed her doubts, and she said blithely:

“Very well, sir, I’ll do just as you say.”

Cæsar accordingly unharnessed Steady, and then, aided by Nadine, proceeded to take from the van the materials for the stage.

This was always a hard bit of work for their weak arms, but it was particularly hard on the days when they had not had any breakfast. Nevertheless they would go bravely to work with the help of the intelligent elephant, who would lift and carry the heavier planks in his powerful trunk.

To-day, however, they had no lack of helpers, for, no sooner did the soldiers see what they were about, than they hastened to offer their assistance, and in a jiffy the stage was set up instead of taking many weary minutes.

Just as it was finished a servant-maid carrying a large basket came up.

“Madame Pradère sent this to you,” she said, smiling, “she thought you might like something to eat,” and she proceeded to produce from the basket a liberal supply of tempting food which she placed upon the stage.

“Truly your mistress is our good angel to-day!” cried Nadine, the tears of joy and gratitude brimming her eyes. “I shall not fail to present to her our thanks before we go away from here.”

This was indeed one of the happiest moments of their lives. They forgot they had a single care as they breakfasted heartily upon the tender chicken, the snow-white bread with plenty of brown crust, the golden butter, and the rich milk which their benefactor had provided so thoughtfully. They had never before enjoyed so delicious a repast, and Nadine’s natural refinement made her appreciate it all the more because of the elegance of its appointments, for the dishes, the

napery, the knives and forks were from Madame's own table.

"May the good God bless her a thousand times and more!" she fervently exclaimed when at last even Cæsar's vigorous appetite was appeased. "What a treat she has given us all! Come now, let us put the things neatly back in the basket. I believe there is enough still left for us to have for dinner."

At three o'clock in the afternoon the Tamby family with the exception of Nadine, who remained in charge of their property, after the manner of performers of their kind, started out to parade the streets so as to let the people know of their presence and the entertainment they proposed to give.

For this purpose a very shabby howdah was with no little difficulty, on account of its weight, fixed upon the patient Nalla's back. In this, little Lydia, with Abel and Cæsar, took their places, trying to look as important as possible.

Cæsar had a drum which he beat at intervals, and whenever there was anybody to listen to him he would call out the place and time of the approaching performance. He always enjoyed this part of the business. He liked being before the public, and to be perched high up on the elephant's

back, and attracting so much attention was quite according to his taste.

As for Vigilant, he too had his part to play. He balanced himself cleverly upon Nalla's broad neck just in front of the howdah and supported Cæsar's drumming by volleys of shrill barking which most clearly meant :

“Here we are ! Listen to us ! Come and patronize our entertainment ! We're well worth seeing I can tell you !”

CHAPTER IV.

A RECORD COLLECTION.

WHEN the parade was over, and it attracted so much attention that Cæsar predicted a bumper house for the evening, the Tambys made a very good dinner upon what was still left in Madame Pradère's bountiful basket, and then Nadine and Cæsar gave the finishing touches to the arrangements for the performance.

What the little mountebanks called somewhat grandly their theater, was really but a few planks placed upon trestles not more than a yard high. The stage was about three yards long by as many deep, and there was a drop-curtain of calico sadly the worse for wear, while the back was closed in by a bit of canvas upon which had been painted some trees with the idea of conveying the notion of a forest.

It was all pathetically simple and shabby, yet Nadine somehow managed by dint of her ingenuity, aided by her excellent taste, to make it look better than one would imagine, by adding sundry

little decorative touches such as only a woman's hand could bestow.

Half-past seven came, and already not only small boys but grown-up people also began to secure their seats upon the planks, the chairs in front being of course all reserved for Madame Pradère and her guests.

A few minutes before eight the soldiers appeared in great number, and the young Tambys would have had a difficult job keeping them out of the reserved seats but for the presence of the gendarme, who called out at the top of his big voice :

“You cannot take those chairs. They are reserved for certain distinguished patrons as you will soon see. Let me tell you, then, not to sit on them.”

“Oh ! we're not deaf. We can hear you all right,” retorted the soldiers, making haste to settle themselves in the best places that were still available.

When eight o'clock struck and neither Madame Pradère nor the other guests put in an appearance the spectators commenced to shout :

“Curtain ! Curtain !” and to utter shrill cries of impatience.

It was the soldiers that called out “Curtain !”

after the fashion of the " gods " in the galleries of the real theaters which they had attended in the cities.

Nadine and Cæsar got very nervous, but they did not dare to begin before the arrival of Madame Pradère.

At this juncture their good friend the gendarme came to their relief.

" Stupid that I am ! " he exclaimed. " Haven't I forgotten to tell you that Madame, the Mayoress, will not be here until half-past eight, in time to hear you sing. You can therefore give the first part of your performance."

This information removed all their difficulties. The regulation three knocks were given and the curtain rose.

Cæsar, clothed in a long red gown, and wearing a hat shaped like a sugar-loaf after the usual manner of magicians, was revealed standing beside a table covered with a Turkish table-cloth, on which were arranged the glasses and double-bottomed boxes which are indispensable to sleight-of-hand performers.

Cæsar's tricks went off very well indeed, and, encouraged by the size and hearty interest of the spectators, he quite eclipsed himself.

There were several hundred gathered, and

among them a number of children who were especially eager to see the different acts in which Nalla, Steady, and Vigilant appeared.

The soldiers, too, who often behave like a lot of children, grew impatient, and began to shout for the animals. They even attempted to imitate them, one grunting like the elephant, another neighing like the horse, and the third barking like the dog.

But the animals were tethered out of sight behind the van, and did not make their appearance.

When the clamor became too insistent Cæsar came to the front of the stage, and held up his hand to ask for silence :

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said with remarkable composure for a mere boy. “We are now about to show you some *tableaux vivants*. For these we ask of you complete silence, and a little patience. The exhibition of the animals will be given very soon. We will carry out the entire program as announced, and we beg of you in return, if you are satisfied with our performance, to be no less liberal with your money than with your applause.”

This little speech quite took the fancy of the crowd, who cheered it heartily, and were about to settle down again to look and listen attentively

when the sound of approaching carriages made itself heard.

Nadine's heart leaped for joy. Here at last were Madame Pradère and her guests. The performance would be honored with their presence after all.

A moment later they appeared, Madame leading the way, her comely countenance covered with smiles, and accompanied by several of her lady friends, while Monsieur Pradère and a dozen of the officers followed in her train, among them being the Colonel, who had thus fulfilled his promise.

This was a great surprise to the rest of the spectators, for certainly it had never been known before that ladies should be present at an open-air performance by mountebanks, while the soldiers were not less surprised to see their officers patronizing such an affair.

This, then, was the explanation of the reserved seats, and for a brief space the first-comers found it more interesting than the items on the program. By so happy a hit the little Tamby family had advanced wonderfully in the estimation of the spectators, who said to themselves that in order to attract such distinguished patrons as the Pradères and their friends they must have some

very unusual acts in their repertoire, and no doubt deserved to be called the little artists.

Nadine at once went forward to bow to Madame Pradère, and to thank her for the honor of her presence, and her kindness to the orphans.

Madame Pradère made light of that, but went on to say with an encouraging smile :

“ My child, I came especially to hear you sing, for I believe that you can tell us pretty things that we do not yet know. So proceed, my little girl. We are here to listen to you.”

Nadine courtesied gracefully, and disappeared behind the curtain. When the curtain rose again she was disclosed in the middle of the stage with her little sister seated near while Cæsar stood ready to accompany her with a mandolin.

A perfect silence fell upon the audience. The girl looked so pretty and modest that she won all hearts, and everybody was in the mood to listen to her with appreciative attention.

She began with a curiously rhythmical prelude, about which there was at the same time something sweet, sad, and strange that gripped the hearts of her hearers. Then in a superb contralto voice, and with exquisite taste, she broke forth into song.

As Madame Pradère had expected, Nadine's

singing was out of the usual order. She was telling in song the pitiful story of a mother who had lost her reason after the death of her only child.

The poor woman, wandering among the mountains of Bohemia, confides her grief to the passing winds, to the echoes murmuring unintelligible things, to the flowers nodding and smiling in response to the caresses of the evening breeze.

In her madness she imagines that the soul of her child has taken refuge in one of the flowers which bestrew her pathway, and she goes from one to the other of them repeating her touching refrain :

“Tell me, O flower ! is it you that hides the soul of my child which was taken away from me by death ?” Then realizing the futility of her inquiries she breaks out into sudden and terrible imprecations : “O death, you merciless monster ! Why did you take my child from me ? You are a foul fiend !” and more after the same fashion.

But presently her mood changes, and, forgetting her sorrow, she begins to sing to the same flowers that she had been cursing, in words of infinite tenderness, such as mothers use to their darling babes.

When Nadine ceased singing instead of a burst of applause there was absolute silence. So completely had she taken possession of her audience by the pathos and beauty of her song that they were unwilling to break the spell, and not until she bowed, and withdrew, did the applause break forth.

Then it was simply thunderous. From every side came cries of :

“Bravo! bravo! encore! encore!”

Blushing and smiling and with her heart throbbing joyously Nadine, looking more charming than ever, returned, and repeated the last verse of the song, putting into it such profound expression and such winning tenderness that many eyes were filled with tears.

At this moment Madame Pradère called little Lydia to her and said, smiling through the tears that brimmed her beautiful eyes :

“My pet, you should now take up the collection. It is just the right time for it. Nadine has touched the people’s hearts and they will not refuse to put their hands in their pockets. Will they, Colonel Laurier?” turning to the officer who sat upon her right.

“No, indeed!” he responded warmly, slipping his own hand into his pocket whence came the

significant jingle of coin. "This crowd will give a fine collection I am sure."

"Very well, Madame, I'll run and tell Nadine," responded Lydia, bowing prettily, and she darted off behind the curtain, which rose the next instant showing Cæsar ready to announce the remainder of the program.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said with quite a grand air, as if fully appreciating the importance of what he had to tell them. "We are now to have the honor of presenting to you the famous trained elephant Nalla in his wonderful acts of intelligence and skill. He is the wisest and kindest elephant in captivity. He understands everything we say to him, and he can talk a little to us in his own way. There is no other such elephant on the continent. We call him our breadwinner because he is the chief attraction of our little show. Before he appears Mademoiselle Lydia will pass amongst you, and will be pleased to receive whatever you may see fit to give in return for the amusement we have provided this evening, and while she is doing this, if you have no objection, I will play a few tunes upon my mandolin. If any one present desires a particular air I shall be very happy to play it if I know how."

Having made this clever little speech with exceeding good grace, Cæsar took up his instrument and in response to the request of one of the officers, began the solo of the Toreador from "Carmen," which he gave with great spirit.

Meanwhile Nadine accompanied Lydia, who, holding a wooden bowl in her hand, began the round of the spectators.

Now on ordinary occasions this was the critical stage of the performance for the young mountebanks, as upon what it yielded depended the grave question of the morrow's bread, and too often, alas! the results were pitifully meager! Many a time had poor little Nadine, upon whom the chief burden of responsibility rested, found it hard to keep back the tears when, as Lydia set out with her bowl, the majority of those who had been watching the performance turned their backs upon the children who had been doing their best to amuse them. Ah! yes, many a time had Nadine, who had learned by experience to gauge her audience pretty accurately by one glance at them, felt her heart sink at the critical moment.

But this time nobody slipped away. They all remained in their places, and seemed eager to respond to the appeal about to be made.

Nadine first led Lydia up to Madame Pradère,

who had called for her that she might be the first to drop a coin into her bowl.

Lydia, as was her custom, repeated in her childish quavering voice, the words :

“ For the little Tambys, ladies and gentlemen, a trifle if you please.”

But it looked as if she would be more than taken at her word, for Madame Pradère set a fine example by dropping a gold piece into the bowl !

When Nadine saw this the color rose in her charming face, and she murmured in a voice that trembled with feeling :

“ Oh, Madame, thank you ! thank you ! ”

“ Never mind thanks, continue your round,” laughed Madame Pradère giving Lydia a gentle push towards the Colonel. Then, turning to Nadine, she added : “ You have given me a great deal of pleasure, my sweet one, I assure you, and we shall want you to sing something more for us—another song about a child, if you can, you can do it with such expression. It goes right to one’s heart.”

“ I shall be glad to do as you desire, Madame,” responded Nadine, and, with a graceful bow, she followed Lydia, whose little cries of joy showed that her mission was proving successful beyond precedent. In fact she was receiving white

money—nothing but white money—no dark coins at all. She had never before had such good fortune, and in her joy she forgot her sister's admonitions, and danced about exclaiming :

“ Another, Nadine, and another ! and still another ! ”

But Nadine did not attempt to restrain her, for she saw that the people were amused with the child's artless demonstrations.

When she had been to all the reserved seats, she turned to the soldiers and workmen who were in the rear, and none of them failed to put in a few sous, although, of course, they gave no silver.

Twice did Lydia empty her bowl into Nadine's lap. It was the first time the Tamby family had taken so much at a performance, and their hearts glowed with joy and gratitude, while the spectators awaited the second part of the program with lively interest.

CHAPTER V.

A REMARKABLE FENCER.

AMID perfect silence the elephant made his entrée under the direction of his little friend Abel, who could do anything he liked with the good-tempered monster.

He proceeded calmly to the center of the open space inclosed by the reserved seats, the planks, and the standing spectators, and then with trunk lowered and motionless, stood at attention.

“Nalla !” said Abel, “we shall now pay our respects to this distinguished gathering.”

Then, taking off his toque, he made sweeping bows to right and left, which the docile elephant imitated by elevating and lowering his trunk in a dignified manner that was highly amusing.

“And now, Nalla,” continued Abel, who bore himself with all the importance of a grown person, “you will be good enough to let us see how much you know and can do. For instance, can you sing like your mistress, Mademoiselle Nadine ?”

“To be sure, I can,” responded Nalla, in dumb show, by lifting his trunk up and down.

“Very well, then,” smiled Abel. “Suppose you give us one of the songs of your own country, something sweet and tender.”

Nalla threw back his enormous ears, and pointing his trunk high into the air, let forth a series of horrible sounds that fairly stunned the ears of the spectators, who nearly rolled over with laughter while they strove to shut out the dreadful noise by clapping their hands over their ears.

“That will do ! that will do ! Nalla !” cried Abel, giving the absurd creature a slight slap with his wand. “You sing beautifully, of course, but you have a shocking bad voice, and you haven’t the least idea of tune. You shall have to take a course of lessons before you again appear in public.”

“All right !” said the waving trunk, and the abominable discords ceased abruptly.

“It is evident that you have a very bad cold to-night, Nalla,” said Abel, “and your voice requires attention. But if you sing so badly, perhaps you are better at dancing ?”

“Certainly, I dance admirably,” responded Nalla, proceeding to put himself in position to begin.

"Would you be so kind, then, as to show our kind patrons a quick-step of your own invention?" asked Abel.

"With pleasure," answered Nalla, but he did not budge nevertheless.

"Why, what's the matter? Why don't you begin?" demanded Abel, with well-simulated surprise and anger.

For reply Nalla resumed singing with his huge horrid voice.

"Ah! I understand," smiled Abel, giving himself a slap with the wand. "*I* was forgetting. You require some one to play for you, of course."

"Yes, yes," replied the mobile trunk, which expressed its owner's meaning quite as well as the fingers of deaf-mutes do what they want to tell.

Turning around, Abel called out :

"Mr. Musician Cæsar, will you be so good as to select from your repertoire something that will do for the elephant to dance to?"

"I shall be very pleased to do so," responded Cæsar promptly, coming forward with his mandolin.

"Ah, thank you, musician," said Nalla, looking highly pleased, and, as soon as Cæsar struck up, he began dancing, if not with grace, at least

with great earnestness. Indeed the huge creature kept time with his feet, and circled about in a way that one could hardly have believed him capable of doing.

“Excellent! Excellent! Nalla!” exclaimed Abel, while the spectators showed their concurrence by a hearty round of applause. “You certainly are a famous dancer. Now that will do for the present. You can take a rest.”

But, instead of obeying, Nalla continued his circling, and the waving of his trunk in a very droll fashion.

“That will do, I tell you,” Abel cried. “Stop, or I’ll have to make you!”

Nalla only danced the harder, and was evidently mocking Abel with that wonderful trunk which seemed equal to expressing any emotion. The spectators laughed heartily. The elephant was more than fulfilling expectations. Indeed they had never before seen so intelligent and amiable a monster.

“Oh, I know what you’re driving at,” said Abel, the angry frown on his face yielding to a smile of comprehension. “You want to fight a duel. All right! I’m at your service.”

Nalla wagged his trunk joyfully, ceased pirouetting, and took up a position opposite Abel,

who produced two foils with buttons, one of which he extended to the elephant.

Nalla eagerly seized it with his trunk, and put himself on guard.

“ Ready now ! ” cried Abel, and at once opened the attack with great spirit.

But Nalla, dexterously wielding his foil, parried every thrust to perfection, and Abel could not get past his guard, try as hard as he might.

The soldiers were highly amused at the lack of skill shown by the eight-year-old boy, and tried to be witty at his expense, whereupon Abel stopped the bout, and, facing the spectators, said in a tone of challenge :

“ Gentlemen, you are laughing at my failure and want of experience. No doubt there are among you many much more expert at fencing than I am. In that case I shall be only too glad to make way. Does any one of those present wish to take my foil, and try a turn with Nalla ? ”

At first there was no response, and Abel repeated his request. Then a soldier advanced slowly.

“ Ah ! ah ! there’s a champion ! ” was called out from the benches.

“ You need not be afraid in the least,” said Abel encouragingly, for the soldier moved in a

hesitating way. "Fence with Nalla just as you would with a comrade. He will play you no mean trick, but I warn you that he's very good at the game."

The soldier smiled cheerfully, and, grasping the foil, put himself in position vis-à-vis to the elephant.

Nalla fixed his bright little eyes upon him, and with foil in trunk awaited the attack.

Now this soldier who had come forward was a young fellow of spirit, who was not lending himself to the little pleasantry in order to show off his skill at fencing. On the contrary, moved by the humor of the occasion, he entered the lists against Nalla quite ready to let the big brute carry off the honors, and without being troubled at all as to the figure he should cut himself.

Accordingly he went at the elephant in lively fashion, but, thrust and feint and dodge as he might, he could not get inside the clever creature's guard, or touch any part of his huge body. Nalla parried every attack with a quickness and precision that was simply astonishing, evidently enjoying the play quite as fully as his active antagonist, who threw himself into it with such vim.

For a while Nalla contented himself with main-

taining his defense, but presently he changed his tactics, and assumed the offensive. Without moving from the spot upon which he stood he lunged and riposted with such swiftness and accuracy of aim that he touched the soldier's chest with the button three times in short order.

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried the spectators, delighted at the big fellow's amazing skill. "Go for him, old chap! Touch him again."

The soldier, not in the least alarmed, defended himself gallantly, but it was evident that he was completely overmatched, and a moment later, Nalla, as if taking pity on his adversary, by a clever pass, disarmed him, and then let his own foil drop.

The place rang with applause while the soldier, carrying out the play with admirable spirit, assumed an attitude of profound humiliation.

When the commotion subsided, there were cries from the soldiers for "Master Deschamps! Master Deschamps!" and Colonel Laurier turned around to survey his men with a questioning look.

Then there came forward a tall athletic man with a strong dark countenance in which eagerness and reluctance seemed to be contending. He was the fencing-master of the regiment, and

had the reputation of being one of the most expert in the whole army. It was, therefore, only natural that the men should be anxious to see what he could do against so redoubtable an opponent.

He approached the Colonel, and by an inquiring look sought to know the latter's will.

Colonel Laurier glanced at Madame Pradère, who in her turn shot a quick look at Nadine.

Nadine smiled back unconcernedly. Madame Pradere nodded her assent to the Colonel, and he said in a low tone to Master Deschamps.

“Try a bout with the creature, but be careful not to do him any harm.”

The fencing-master bowed, and taking the foil from little Abel put himself on guard.

The excitement was now intense, and the spectators were perfectly silent. The soldiers expected great things from their champion, to whom every trick and strategy of the art of fencing was known, and the Tamby family were even more confident concerning their gigantic representative.

The fencing-master went to work very warily at first. He wanted to learn the extent of his novel antagonist's skill, and he circled about in front of him, making dexterous passes and de-

ceiving feints with such rapidity that they could scarcely be followed by the human eye.

But the little black beads that twinkled in Nalla's huge head were not to be misled. Wherever Master Deschamps' foil flashed there was the elephant's ready to meet it, and the air rang with the sound of steel striking steel while the spectators watched the strange struggle breathlessly.

At last the man grew angry. It seemed absurd to be thus bettered at his own speciality by a mere animal however big. He darted this way and that, lunging fiercely, if not recklessly. He resorted even to devices that were not considered "good form" in the fencing-hall. But they were all alike in vain. Nalla, without stirring a foot, simply by waving his trunk with the foil firmly held in the end, parried every attack and remained untouched.

Then Abel whispered to him the single word "Now," and at once he changed his tactics. Hitherto he had been on the defense. Now he took up the attack. The foil fairly whistled through the air with the rapidity of his movements. Again and yet again the button touched the tunic of the fencing-master, not roughly, but with just sufficient force that there should be no mistake.

Despite the discomfiture of their champion the soldiers broke forth into roars of applause. Nalla had won their hearts by his superb and placid dignity. He was the finest beast they had ever seen, and they did not grudge him his victory.

But Master Deschamps did not take it in equally good part. He felt bitterly humiliated. His face grew crimson with rage. His eyes glowed like burning coals, and at last forgetting himself in his fury he gave an inarticulate hoarse cry, and rushed at the elephant brandishing his foil with the evident intention of using it, not in the proper way, but as a whip wherewith to smite his successful antagonist.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANIMALS DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES.

NADINE screamed and darted forward. Madame Pradère shrieked and rose from her chair. The Colonel sprang to his feet, and shouted: "Master Deschamps—Halt!" in his most commanding tone.

They were all concerned for the elephant, who was thus threatened with cruel blows from the shining steel. But their anxiety was after all unfounded. Nalla, perfectly alive to the impending danger, stood motionless until the fencing-master was within range of that marvelous trunk, and then there was one movement of the sinuous powerful thing, the sharp swish of steel cutting the air, and the baffled soldier's foil, torn from his grasp, went flying through the air into the darkness behind the van.

There was one moment of amazed silence, and then burst forth a tumult of applause to which all previous ones were as nothing. The special

guests were delighted at the astonishing adroitness of Nalla, while the soldiers, not failing to appreciate it, were even more delighted at the discomfiture of Master Deschamps, who was a merciless martinet that often made their lives miserable.

As for the fencing-master—he seemed so utterly chagrined, and slunk away looking so cast down, that Colonel Laurier considered he was sufficiently punished, and let him go unrebuked.

After this excitement it seemed appropriate to have the soothing influence of a song, and accordingly Cæsar announced amid general approval that Nadine would now fulfill her promise of singing again.

The little woman, her pretty countenance wreathed in smiles, for this wonderful evening had made her heart lighter than it had been for many a day, then came forward, and Cæsar being ready with his mandolin, began a lovely cradle-song with a curious penetrating charm.

The spectators were greatly pleased with it, and if Nadine had been guided by the successive waves of applause, she would have sung again and again. But the hour was getting late, and there still remained to be given the grand act in which all the animals took part, and which was

being anticipated with the keenest interest by the younger portion of the assembly.

First of all, the dog, Vigilant, with the cap of a mousquetaire upon his head, and a neat pair of boots upon his hind paws, made his appearance mounted upon Steady, looking very happy and important. He had, attached to his right paw, a tiny whip with which in a very comical way he flipped his steed from time to time as if he was impatient for the sedate old animal to quicken his pace.

But Steady took not the slightest notice of these attentions from his rider. He came in with a slow chump-chump-chump, his head hanging between his fore-legs, and his whole appearance that of a horse thoroughly tired out, while Vigilant ran up and down his back from neck to tail and back again, his rapid barks expressing alternately coaxing and scolding, persuasion and abuse.

Yet all without avail. Steady remained equally deaf to threats as to entreaties. He positively make one ache with sympathy to look at him, so perfectly did the clever beast enact extreme weariness.

Presently Steady sank upon his knees, and, after resting in that attitude a moment, made a

great effort to regain his feet, but seeming unable to do it, fell over on his side, and, stretching out his head, lay upon the ground as limp and motionless as though he were dead.

At once Vigilant, being thus sent to the ground much against his will, sent up a most piteous bewailing so far as it could be expressed through the medium of barking. He went to Steady's head and barked right into his ears to make him understand the better. But all to no purpose. Steady did not budge.

Then Vigilant got angry, and he circled around Steady pouring upon him a shower of blows from his whip. These having no effect, he stopped as if at last realizing that his steed was dead, and, squatting down on his hind legs, began to cry, and to wipe away the tears with his left paw in an exceedingly funny way.

Suddenly he lifted his head and pricked up his ears. He heard the voice of a child singing softly. With an eager volley of barks he called for assistance. Whereupon Nalla appeared upon the scene with Lydia perched upon his broad neck.

"Did you call me, young sir?" asked Lydia precisely as if she were addressing one of her own kind.

“Yes—yes—” yapped Vigilant excitedly.

“And what can I do for you?” inquired Lydia with a sympathetic smile.

Vigilant did his best to explain. He pointed with his paw to Steady lying prone upon the ground, apparently dead, and with the most touching little barks he strove to make his meaning clear.

Lydia looked as if she understood what he was driving at, but said in a guileless way :

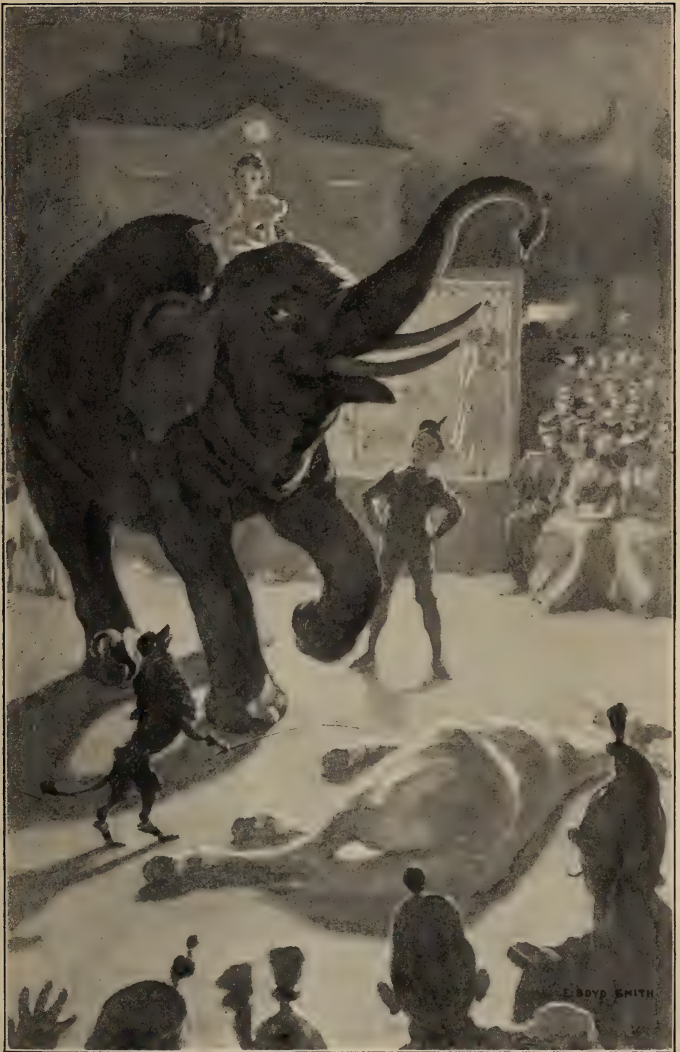
“Young sir, I am only a child, and my education is far from complete. I can, it is true, speak several languages, but I know nothing of the one you use. However, I think that with a little patience it will be possible for us to understand each other. Do you follow me?”

“Oh, perfectly!” responded Vigilant, bowing neatly.

“Very well, then,” continued Lydia. “As you understand me, we shall proceed. I shall ask you some questions, and you will answer me, one bark being for ‘yes,’ and two for ‘no.’ You catch that? All right. Have you come a long way? Yes. You are, then, perhaps some young prince making a tour of the country?”

“That’s it,” replied Vigilant.

“Very good! You’re a young prince, I’ve no



"ALAS, I DO!" ANSWERED THE DOG.

doubt," said Lydia, "judging from your distinguished manners, and the elegance of your speech. But this horse that is lying down there, does he belong to you?"

"Yes indeed," responded the dog emphatically.

"He is tired or sick, perhaps," continued Lydia in a tone of sympathy, "and you cannot continue your journey, eh?"

At this Vigilant made shift to weep, and to cross his paws over his heart in a most beseeching manner.

"Your distress is very touching, young sir," said the child. "You think your horse is dead?"

"Alas, I do!" answered the dog in a long pitiful whine.

"It is indeed very unfortunate that a young gentleman of your quality should find himself in this predicament in such a lonely place," pursued Lydia. "Your parents are no doubt anxiously awaiting your return?"

"You've just hit it! You're quite right," the eager barking seemed to reply.

"Ah! I understand," went on Lydia, her face brightening with a sudden gleam of comprehension. "You have perhaps disobeyed your mother?"

"Yes, I have," Vigilant confessed with a very penitent air.

"Then you are being punished for your misbehavior," rejoined Lydia with the air of a grandmother. "So much the worse for you. You've been naughty, and you must take the consequences. I can't do anything for you, young sir. Good-luck and good-bye to you. Come, Nalla, we must go on our way."

But Nalla did not stir, and began to make certain mutterings as though he were begging Lydia for something.

"What do you want, Nalla?" demanded Lydia. "Do you wish to give some assistance to this young man?"

The elephant's trunk gave an emphatic answer in the affirmative.

"Yes," it seemed to say. "I do, because it would be a kindness."

"To be sure! I was forgetting your power," returned Lydia, adding as she turned to Vigilant, "You are fortunate, young sir, that Nalla came your way, for you must know that having been brought up in a temple, Nalla, when he was young, received from the god Buddha the power of doing three times in his life whatever good action he might see fit, even though it were

bringing a horse back to life, and Nalla now is going to revive your poor old horse."

On hearing this Vigilant poured forth a volley of joyful barks, and started dancing around in a way that Lydia called waltzing.

Then Nalla, having lifted Lydia to the ground with his wonderful trunk which served so many useful purposes, approached Steady, whom he touched gently with his trunk, and, directed by Lydia, walked three times around him, waving his trunk in a curious spiral fashion. Next, thrusting it under the motionless horse, he endeavored to lift him to his feet, but the moment he offered to take away the support the poor beast threatened to fall down again.

Vigilant now saw that he must come to Nalla's aid, and he made haste to pile up the dust with his paws under each of the horse's feet as the clowns do in the circus in their own ridiculous fashion.

This proceeding evoked a roar of laughter from the highly amused spectators, and when it was finished Nalla let out a tremendous trumpeting, fit to rouse the world. It was effectual in rousing Steady at all events, and, with a shake that seemed to make his bones rattle, he stood up straight.

Vigilant was most profuse in his gratitude, making profound bows, accompanied by graceful salutes with the little whip fastened to his paw.

Lydia again bid him "Good-day," and Nalla putting out his trunk for her, regained her place upon his broad back.

As they were departing, Vigilant called them back. It was all well enough to bring his steed back to life, and set him upon his feet again, but now that he had dismounted he was quite unable to remount without assistance.

"Sure enough!" smiled Lydia in response to his excited request. "I might have thought of that. Nalla will be happy to do you that slight service, won't you, Nalla?"

Nalla waved his trunk in token of assent, and then extended it towards Vigilant. The dog kept perfectly still while the wonderful appendage that could do almost anything, picked him up in the most careful manner, and deposited him upon the back of the horse.

Then the whole party withdrew, and the next moment Lydia reappeared to proceed with her song. But the other actors in the little scene were in such high spirits that they could not permit her to have the singing to herself.

First, Vigilant lifted up his voice with great

energy. Then Steady, to whom Lydia had given a lump of sugar, whinnied his satisfaction in an insistent fashion, and finally Nalla joined in with his deafening and by no means melodious trumpeting, swinging his huge head from side to side, and completing a quartet, whose music, while it stunned the ears of the audience, was certainly ridiculous enough to make the most morose smile, and win a laugh from the most dignified.

This concluded the entertainment, and the spectators, thoroughly well pleased with what they had seen and heard, began to disperse. Madame Pradère went forward to congratulate Nadine, and to invite her and Lydia to come and see her next morning before they left for another place. The Mayor and the Colonel also signified the pleasure the performance had given them, and in a little while the whole gathering had vanished.

When they were by themselves in their van the young Tambys made haste to reckon up the receipts of the evening with beaming countenances.

“It can’t be so much, Nadine!” cried Cæsar on his sister announcing the total. “You are surely mistaken!”

“Well, let us go over it again, Cæsar,” rejoined

Nadine with a happy smile, and accordingly the white and brown coins, among which kind Madame Pradère's gold piece glittered conspicuously, were once more carefully counted.

“One hundred and twenty-eight francs!” exclaimed Cæsar, springing to his feet, and waving his cap joyously. “Just think of it! We never had so much money of our own before! And to get it all in one evening! Oh! that kind good Madame, and the polite Colonel, it was because of them we did so well. We owe it to them, don't we, Nadine?” and in the ecstasy of his delight he threw his arms around his pretty sister's neck, and kissed her warmly.

Nadine blushed with pleasure at this rare tribute of brotherly affection.

“Yes, indeed, Cæsar,” she responded. “Madame Pradère is certainly our good angel, and we shall all go to thank her again before we leave here. Oh! if only our dear father were still alive, how glad he would be! We never made so much at one performance when he was with us,” and at the recollection of her father the young girl's fine eyes filled with tears, and her rosy lips quivered.

But, controlling her grief, she smiled brightly through her tears as she added :

“ We shall all have plenty to eat for a good while now, and Nalla, and Steady, and Vigilant will grow fat again. Come now, let us all get to bed. We’re tired out, and there’ll be plenty to do in the morning.”

So in quick time the van was by a few simple changes converted into a sleeping-apartment, and after Cæsar had seen to it that the animals lacked for nothing, the light-hearted quartet of children, having committed themselves to the care of the good God, whom their parents had taught them to love, lay down to sleep, little imagining how rudely their much-needed rest was ere long to be disturbed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAMPEDING OF NALLA.

It was drawing near to midnight. The market-place was wrapped in darkness and silence. The Tamby family children inside the van were dreaming pleasantly of fresh successes, while close by Nalla and Steady dozed comfortably after the labors of the day, and the excitement of the evening.

The gendarme, whose duty it was to patrol the market-place, and who had been one of the most appreciative spectators of the performance, after making a few turns of the square, and assuring himself that things were all right, sat down upon some hay in a corner, and before he knew what he was about fell fast asleep.

A few minutes later two dark forms glided stealthily out from an alley, and crept towards the Tambys' van. That their presence meant no good, the method of their approach clearly indicated, but who were they, and upon what mischief were they bent?

To answer this question it must be explained

that in the town was an academy which had many pupils, and of these a number had attended the performance. On their return to the academy they got into a lively discussion about the animals, and Nalla, of course, was the chief subject.

One of the elder boys, who really was well informed for his age, and liked to make a show of his learning, asserted that in spite of their size elephants were great cowards, and were terrified at the sight of a mouse.

The other boys laughed at this statement.

“A great big elephant afraid of a tiny mouse!” they cried. “Fudge! you don’t know what you’re talking about!”

This angered Raoul, and the controversy waxed warm until finally, carried away by excitement, he shouted:

“Look here now, fellows, I do know what I’m talking about, and if any of you will get me a mouse I’ll prove it.”

A chorus of derisive laughter greeted this challenge, which angered Raoul still more, and he fairly screamed out:

“Get me a mouse, and I’ll show you that I’m right!”

“A mouse! a mouse! who knows where to get a mouse?” called out one of the senior boys,

looking around as though he expected some one to produce the tiny animal from his pocket.

“I do,” responded a little fellow with a sharp thin face that gave him somewhat the appearance of a mouse himself. “I have three of them in a box. I keep them as pets.”

At this announcement there was a shout of satisfaction, and the youngster was bidden to bring out his curious pets.

He ran off, and presently returned with a little pasteboard box in which some live thing could be heard moving.

“Bravo!” cried the others with the exception of Raoul, who looked decidedly disconcerted. “Now we are all right. We have the mouse, and Raoul will show us how he can frighten the big elephant.”

To judge by Raoul’s expression he would greatly prefer going off quietly to bed, but he was in for it now, and must at least make an effort to carry the thing through.

So, summoning his resolution, he assumed a jaunty air, and said, gayly :

“Come along then. We’ll see if I’m not right.” And he led the way followed by as many boys as dared risk the consequences of being away from the school at night without leave.

They slipped out of the building silently, and directed their steps to the market-place. Here, Raoul, who was of course in command, ordered all but one to remain hidden in an empty stall, while he and his chum went over to the van.

They moved as noiselessly as shadows, and when they reached there, the Tamby children and the animals were wrapped in profound slumber. Not even Vigilant scented their approach.

Trembling all over with nervousness, their hearts beating like trip-hammers, and their mouths parched as with great thirst, the two boys crept near to Nalla, who stood beside the van as motionless as if carved out of stone.

With shaking fingers they opened the little box, and, seizing its tiny occupant, threw it at the sleeping monster.

The mouse struck Nalla full upon the trunk, and then dropped at his feet, stunned by the cruel blow.

In an instant the great creature was awake, and the tip of his trunk touched the furry morsel on the ground, which squeaked and struggled piteously.

The effect upon the elephant was appalling. A violent convulsion shook his mighty frame. He broke forth into terrible trumpetings, and,

snapping his tether as though it had been only a thread, he dashed off at full speed into the darkness, flying panic-stricken from what had terrified him.

Immediately wild confusion succeeded the quiet which had reigned. Vigilant set up a frantic barking, and Steady joined in with an anxious whinnying. The Tambys started from their sleep, and rushed out of the van in their night-dresses screaming with fright ; the gendarme, aroused from his pleasant dozing in the hay, sought to cover his lapse of duty by rattling his sword, and shouting fiercely :

“What is the matter ? What means all this row ? I demand to know at once.”

But there was at first no one to answer him. The mischievous boys and Nalla had disappeared, and they alone knew what had taken place.

Presently Nadine recovered her wits, and at once realized the situation.

“Nalla has been frightened,” she cried, “and has run off. Oh ! how shall we get him back ?”

“Why, he’ll come back himself when he gets over his scare,” responded Cæsar, doing his best to be cheerful. “If not, we’ll find him in the morning all right.”

But Nadine was not to be easily comforted.

Nalla's frantic trumpeting had filled her heart with terror, and this combined with the sudden awakening from sleep, had completely unnerved her. She burst into tears, and wrung her hands as she sobbed out :

“ Poor Nalla ! what will happen to him ? He'll be sure to get hurt. Oh ! Isn't it dreadful ! ”

Her distress certainly had good grounds. A huge creature, mad with terror, charging wildly through the streets of the town, and perhaps out into the country, could hardly fail to do injury to himself if not to others.

By the time the matter was made clear to the dull-witted though well-intentioned gendarme, a number of the soldiers had come over from their side of the market-place to offer their services if they could be of any use.

An excited consultation followed in which several voices were always trying to make themselves heard simultaneously, and there did not seem much hope of any practical issue until one of the officers put in an appearance, and he at once assumed the direction of affairs.

He questioned the tearful Nadine and the troubled Cæsar about Nalla and his habits, and on learning how kind and faithful a creature he was, he strove to reassure them.

“Make your minds easy,” he said in a tone of superior knowledge. “Nothing dreadful will happen. The elephant will run until he is tired, and then he will find some nice fresh herbage, and he will stop to feed upon it. It would be no use trying to find him to-night, but immediately after reveille in the morning I will put at your services a detail of soldiers, and they will go out to look for your elephant.”

Nadine and Cæsar thanked him warmly. He was quite right after all. It would be useless searching for Nalla in the darkness. They must wait for daylight, and so they bade everybody “Good-night” and went back into their van to wait for the morning.

The two younger children soon fell asleep again, but not so did Nadine and Cæsar. They spent the long hours whispering to each other conjectures as to what could possibly have so frightened Nalla, and exchanging hopes of how soon he would be found again.

At dawn they were ready and watching impatiently for the soldiers. The officer proved even better than his promise, for having reported the affair to Colonel Laurier, the latter had in the goodness of his heart, ordered out fifty soldiers with the command that they were to continue the

search until the elephant had been found and returned to its owners.

At the suggestion of the officer, who was a particularly quick-witted young man, four parties were formed and one of the children accompanied each, the shrewd idea being that whichever party located Nalla there would be with it one that the great creature loved and trusted, and whose orders he would obey.

The plan of campaign having been thus skillfully arranged, the four parties set off upon their quest, going north, south, east, and west from the market-place.

All this kindness was not without its cheering influence upon the Tambys, who quite recovered their spirits, and high with hope of nothing serious having happened to their breadwinner, bade each other good-luck as the parties separated.

It not being possible even for a story-writer to be in four places at the same time, only Nadine's party will be followed.

They steered due north, making inquiries of every one they met upon the route. At first the answers returned gave them no encouragement that they were in the right direction. But after they had cleared the town and got into the outskirts, they began to hear of some strange enor-

mous thing that had been caught sight of as it sped along the road. Those who first glimpsed it had not fully believed their senses, and supposed themselves to be the object of some delusion. Farther on, however, their informants had had more light to see by, and were able to give a better account, until presently they received so accurate a description of the marvel that they knew they were hot upon the scent.

“We shall come up with him soon now,” said the officer confidently to Nadine. “He wouldn’t run far after he got tired, and he’d be sure to look out for something to eat.”

They kept on at good speed, plying every one with questions, and getting such full replies as to the startling size and aspect of the creature that they expected to have his huge gray shape loom into sight at any moment.

Finally they came to a prosperous farm among the outbuildings of which something very exciting was evidently transpiring, as the folks were hurrying thither breathlessly.

“Nalla’s there!” cried Nadine, clutching the officer’s arm in her anxiety. “I hope they’re not hurting him. Oh! come, let us be quick and get to him.”

“Hurting him!” laughed the officer. “Not

much fear of that ! He can take care of himself. I'm more concerned about his hurting some of them. Come along ! ” and catching the girl's hand he broke into a run.

CHAPTER VIII.

NALLA RECOVERED.

THEY made their way around the rear of the barn, and then one glance was sufficient to explain the excitement. Before them stretched an extensive market-garden, displaying a splendid variety of vegetables in full growth ; cabbages, cauliflowers, beets, carrots, radishes, celery, and so forth, covered the well-weeded soil with their succulent verdure.

The sagacious elephant had not taken long to appreciate the opportunity upon which he had come by the mere chance of his frantic flight. The tempting green things had appealed at once to him, and he was busy sampling the different delicacies, pulling them from the ground with that wonderful trunk of his quite as deftly as the proprietor or his servants could have done it with their hands.

Meanwhile the latter, armed with pitchforks, rakes, brooms, and other rural implements, were keeping a respectful distance as they shouted

and waved their weapons at the voracious intruder, who proceeded with his feast as steadily and calmly as if he neither saw nor heard them.

The officer broke into laughter in which Nadine, relieved beyond expression at the sight of her precious elephant, not only unharmed, but enjoying himself so hugely, could not resist joining.

“ Just look at the clever old fellow ! ” chuckled the officer. “ Isn’t he having a fine time of it ? It seems a pity to disturb him.”

“ Oh ! but he will do so much damage, and we will have to pay for it ! ” cried Nadine, who had always, poor girl, to consider the financial side of things, for was she not the little mother of a family that had many needs ?

“ That’s so ! ” responded the officer, making a grimace. “ There’ll be a bill for damages, I suppose. Let us go to him and get him to stop his blow-out at once.”

Nadine’s appearance was not noticed by the rustics until she went right up to the elephant, and seized his trunk, saying :

“ You naughty Nalla ! you mustn’t do that ! You’re stealing these vegetables, and I’ll have to pay the farmer for them.”

To the amazement of all save the officer, the elephant at once stopped his eager feeding, gave

forth a joyful trumpeting, passed his trunk affectionately over Nadine's face, and then, wrapping it about her body, lifted her slight form to his neck, where he deposited her as gently as a mother would her baby.

From her commanding position Nadine made haste to address the open-mouthed rustics.

"I am so sorry, my Nalla," she said, patting the huge head with a certain air of reproof that the intelligent creature really seemed to understand, "has given you such a scare, and eaten so many of your vegetables. But something frightened him last night on the market-place, and he ran away, and we have been hunting for him ever since dawn. I will pay the owner of the garden for the damage he has done."

The murmur of astonishment changed into one of applause. There are no people with a livelier appreciation of dash and daring than the French, and Nadine's dramatic appearance on the scene, and remarkable self-possession for so young a girl, made a profound impression.

One of the men cried out, "Bravo! Bravo!" and the others joined in, their hitherto frightened faces beaming with relief and interest.

The quick-witted officer saw the chance of getting Nadine out of the difficulty without any

cost ; stepping forward and making a gesture to command attention, he said :

“ It is true that the elephant has done a certain amount of damage here, for which his young mistress is quite willing to pay if the proprietor of the garden insists ; but it has occurred to me that you might like to have the big fellow pay the bill himself, by showing you how clever he is, and how he understands every word that his mistress says to him.”

This proposition was received with an instant chorus of approval, and the proprietor, a good-natured prosperous man, who had by this time completely got over both his fright and his indignation, having graciously signified his assent, the officer turned to Nadine and said :

“ Now, Mademoiselle, will you be kind enough to show these good people what a very wise and intelligent animal your elephant is ? ”

Nadine, smiling radiantly, for her young heart had been sorely troubled at the prospect of having to pay, she had no idea how much, for what Nalla had destroyed or eaten, at once proceeded to put the great creature through his repertoire of tricks.

He bowed, he danced, he sang, he picked up the tiniest objects with his trunk, he responded

“yes ” or “ no,” most appropriately to her questions, and altogether so delighted the country-folk that they were loath to let him leave them.

But of course Nadine, so soon as her mind was relieved, bethought herself of Cæsar, and Abel, and Lydia, and was impatient for them to be spared further anxiety. So as soon as it could be managed she took her departure, having thanked the proprietor very prettily for his leniency.

She rode on Nalla's neck back to the market-place, and her return was somewhat in the nature of a triumph, for the others had all got back with nothing to report, and were consequently in very low spirits, and when she appeared mounted upon the missing animal they shouted and screamed for joy, while the crowd that had gathered out of curiosity vigorously applauded.

They had just got over their demonstrations, and were setting about preparations to make a move from the town towards the next halting-place, when the gendarme bustled up to say that the secret of the elephant's stampede had been discovered, and that Nadine's presence was required at the Sous-Préfet's office.

“ You will please come with me, Mademoiselle,”

puffed the fat old fellow. "I will be your escort, and you shall have the satisfaction of seeing the rascals who played such a mean trick upon you properly punished."

Nadine, dear little soul, was so happy at the affair having terminated without any ill consequences, that she had not the slightest desire for vengeance upon the perpetrators of the mischief, and would fain have let the matter rest. But of course a summons from the *Préfet* could not be disregarded, so, leaving to Cæsar the packing-up, she accompanied the *gendarme*.

In the Mayor's office she found a number of people, and among them three very miserable looking schoolboys, who were presently subjected to a sharp examination.

It seemed that the absence of the boys from the school had been detected by one of the teachers, who set himself to discover what it meant, and by clever investigation had got to the bottom of the affair, whereupon, not knowing how serious the outcome might be, he had reported it to the authorities.

Raoul and two others were accordingly haled to the *Préfet's* office for a sort of preliminary examination, and Nadine was called upon to be prosecutor

Instead, however, of presenting her complaint, she put in an earnest plea for the culprits, who were much about her own age.

“Please, your Honor, I don’t want them to be punished. Nalla is not a bit the worse for his fright. Indeed,” she added naïvely, “he is the better for it by such a fine breakfast of vegetables as he has not had for a long time.”

A ripple of laughter ran around the crowd at this charming little speech, and the Préfet with a gallant bow to Nadine, said, graciously :

“You make a very good advocate, Mademoiselle, and as you do not want to appear as prosecutor in the matter I will dismiss the accused, and let the authorities of the school deal with them as they see fit for the infraction of discipline. Permit me to congratulate you upon the fortunate termination of the accident.”

Raoul and his companions regarded Nadine with looks in which gratitude and admiration were manifestly mingled. They had come to the Préfet’s office in fear and trembling, and they would, of course, be well punished by the head of the school as it was, but the dismissal by the Préfet without any penalty was an altogether unlooked for piece of luck, which they owed in large measure to the very person who had most

reason to find satisfaction in their being condignly punished.

Nor did Nadine's magnanimity go without reward. The whole affair served as the best kind of advertisement, and the demand on the part of those who had not been present at the first performance, to be given the opportunity to attend another, was so urgent that she wisely changed her plan of leaving the town that day.

"We shall not, of course, get anything like so splendid a collection as we did last night, because good Madame Pradère and the kind officers will not be there again; but we shall most probably get a good deal more than we usually do, and so it will be worth our while to stay over one more night."

Cæsar quite concurred in the wisdom of this proposal, and accordingly the preparations for a move were stopped, and in their place they began arrangements for the evening.

The sequel fully sustained the shrewdness of the young girl's forecast. The Tamby family, their youth, their brave independence, their wonderfully trained animals, the interest taken in them by the Mayor and his good wife, and the shabby trick which had been played upon them by some of the pupils at the academy, were the

talk of the town, and long before the hour announced for the beginning of the performance the plank seats were bending beneath their load of humanity, while behind and around them the crowd was packed as close as possible.

The whole program of the preceding evening, with some additions, was given without a hitch. Nalla, Steady, and Vigilant played their several parts to perfection, and the spectators applauded contentedly.

When it came to the collection the response was not quite so generous as at the first performance. There was no Madame Pradère to lead off with a gold piece, and no officers to emulate her with silver coins.

But there were some "white pieces" nevertheless, and a great number of "brown pieces," so that altogether the Tambys felt well repaid for their evening's work.

The following morning Nadine, taking Lydia with her, went to pay her respects to Madame Pradère, and to thank her for her great kindness. On the way she met the good-natured gendarme, who let her into the secret of Madame Pradère's interest in them.

"You must know," said the genial old fellow, "that Madame Pradère has suffered a terrible

affliction. She once had four children, two boys and two girls, just as there are in your family, and the youngest of them was, strange to say, named Lydia, and, sad to tell, she lost all four of them within two years !”

Nadine’s eyes filled with tears, and her heart thrilled with sympathy for her benefactress when she heard this.

“The poor lady !” she murmured. “I am so sorry for her, and she is so kind.”

Madame Pradère received the two girls cordially, and asked them how they were getting on, and what were their plans for the future.

As they were taking their leave, she handed Nadine a sealed envelope, saying :

“Keep this in a safe place, and do not open it unless you are in great need. Remember me, my dear child ; I will always be your friend.”

CHAPTER IX.

NALLA TO THE RESCUE.

THE Tambys' intention was to proceed to the fair at Beaulieu, where mountebanks usually did well, and as it would open in three weeks, and it would take them quite twenty days to get there with so old and weak a horse as Steady, they had little time to lose.

They set off in the forenoon, all four of them deeply regretting that they must leave this place, where they had found so many kind friends, and once more make their way amongst strangers, the most of whom took no interest in them whatever.

En route to Beaulieu they halted frequently to give performances, with varying success. Sometimes the receipts would hardly be enough to buy food for the animals, and sometimes more than sufficient to provide for them all.

"It is certainly fortunate that we did get such a fine collection at Morainville," said Nadine one night, when a mere handful of small dirty copper

coins was all they received for a very tiring performance after a long day's travel, "or I don't know what we should do now. I am using as little of it as I possibly can, but it is getting less and less all the time."

"Oh, never mind, sister!" responded Cæsar, who was of a very hopeful disposition, and did not worry like Nadine, not feeling the same sense of responsibility; "we'll make plenty of money at the fair, see if we don't."

"I hope we will, I'm sure," returned Nadine, letting the anxious look drop from her pretty features; "for you see the summer is coming to an end and the winter will be at hand before very long, and we must have a good deal saved up to carry us through that."

"And we will have it, dear Nadine," cried Cæsar confidently, giving her a brotherly hug, and a smacking kiss that brought the blushes to her cheeks. "Never fear about that. The good God will take care of us," and off he went whistling merrily, Nadine following him with as much love and pride in her look as though she were his mother.

He was really a fine chap, Cæsar—brave, bright, manly, unselfish, and devoted to his sisters and little brother. Not as shrewd and far-seeing

as Nadine, but clever enough in his way, and certain to get on in the world, if given a fair chance.

Their worst experience was at Malaventure, a town that had grown up beside a large colliery, whose miners formed the bulk of the inhabitants. Nadine, with her remarkable intuition, had some misgivings about performing there, because the place had rather a bad reputation for rowdyism, the miners being for the most part a rough lot ; but Cæsar, having faith in the youth and beauty of his sister to appeal to the chivalry of the men, and insure a warm reception and proper treatment, was strongly in favor of their trying their fortune, and so she assented.

Had they been compelled to rely upon their own accomplishments they would have fared badly in regard to an audience, for the rough miners saw nothing to attract them in the performance of a quartet of children.

The elephant, however, was quite another matter. He was well worth examining at close quarters, and, moreover, it could not fail to be amusing to see so huge and apparently clumsy a creature doing tricks. Accordingly a large number of them gathered, and noisily shouldered and chaffed each other as they crowded close upon the

space before the van in which the performance was given.

Nadine was undeniably nervous. The big coarse men frightened her, and she regretted that she had yielded to Cæsar's persuasion. But having once begun they must perforce go through to the end, so she put on a brave face, and went ahead.

The miners were pleased to be in a critical mood. They jeered at Cæsar's jugglery, ridiculed his playing, and sent poor little Abel off the stage in tears. Of Nalla, however, they were good enough to approve. He evidently realized their expectations and put them in such good humor that when, following him, Nadine appeared to sing, they received her so warmly that for the moment she forgot her nervousness, and bowed and smiled back at them in a charming way that evoked still more vigorous applause.

Accompanied by Cæsar on the mandolin she sang a pretty little love song which took very well, and was insistently encored. When she had responded and Cæsar had announced that after the collection was taken up the final act in which all the animals appeared would be given, she deemed it best not to send little Lydia among those rough men, but to go herself.

Accordingly, bowl in hand, she started on her rounds, and at first although some of the men tried to display their rude wit at her expense, and were amused by the indignant flush which crimsoned her countenance, she had no real trouble until in going through one of the rear rows a big black-bearded fellow attempted to throw his arm about her and give her a kiss.

Nadine screamed, and by a quick movement evaded the repulsive embrace, but the ruffian, who had been drinking too much brandy, lurched after her as she darted towards the van, calling out :

“Cæsar ! Cæsar ! Help !”

Cæsar, who was at that moment behind the curtain, dressing Vigilant for the next act, dropped the dog, and rushed to the front, picking up one of the foils on the way.

The black-bearded bully was close upon Nadine's skirts, none of the other spectators having the courage to interfere, and it seemed as if he might reach her before Cæsar, when relief came from an unexpected quarter.

Old Nalla had stood beside the van solemnly swaying his trunk, and to all appearance lost in profound contemplation, until Nadine's scream reached his ear. Then the great ragged flaps

were pricked up, and from in front of them the bright, beady, little eyes peered forth keenly. Without making a sound the huge creature glided towards the audience, and was at the edge of the crowd almost without being noticed.

At that moment Nadine flew past pursued by the bully, whose outstretched hand sought to grasp the long tresses of her beautiful hair. But before it could close upon the silken braid a long sinuous thing suddenly shot forth and enfolded the ruffian. To his paralyzing horror he was lifted from his feet, and swung into the air amid the panic-stricken outcries of the spectators. No one thought any more of Nadine. Their eyes were fixed upon the bully struggling vainly in the irresistible grasp of Nalla's trunk, and shouting frantically for help.

The elephant held him thus on high for one thrilling moment and then flung him to one side, as though he had been a bundle of straw instead of being a hulking big fellow weighing full two hundred pounds.

He fell upon the hard pavement with a terrible thud, and lay there so still that the appalled spectators thought he must be dead.

Nadine was the first to be at his side. The instant Nalla intervened she divined what would

happen. More than once she had seen him pick up fierce dogs with that marvelous weapon of his, and throw them so far that they never returned to the attack.

“ Oh ! I hope he isn’t dead ! ” she panted. “ It would be dreadful if Nalla killed him.”

The big gross body showed no sign of life, and the people crowded around it making all sorts of futile suggestions, but doing nothing, when a couple of gendarmes appeared, and ordered them to stand aside.

One of them then examined the man carefully, and, to Nadine’s inexpressible relief, announced that he was not dead, only insensible, and he bade his comrade go for a surgeon.

In a few minutes the latter returned with a spectacled person who looked very wise and dignified, and proceeded to make a thorough examination of the insensible man.

“ There is probably some concussion of the brain,” he announced, “ but not of a serious character. How was he injured ? ”

Half-a-dozen began to speak at once in response, but the next moment gave way to Nadine, who described what had happened in a clear correct manner.

“ Hum ! hum ! ” murmured the surgeon. “ A

very odd accident indeed in this quarter of the globe, and the rascal richly deserved what befell him. Where is this highly intelligent elephant ? I should like to make his acquaintance."

Cæsar had hustled Nalla off behind the scenes, but on Nadine calling out :

"Cæsar ! Cæsar ! Bring Nalla out !" he forthwith led him out again.

The surgeon bowed gravely to the great beast, who returned the salute with a gracious wave of his trunk, for Nalla never erred in discriminating between friends and foes.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Sir Elephant," said the surgeon. "You have just given a proof of your sagacity that I regret I was not present to witness. May I express the wish that you will always be as ready to champion the fair and defend the weak !"

As he said the last words he bowed low to Nadine, who smiled and blushed in return, and then he withdrew to give further directions concerning his patient.

Both Nadine and Cæsar were much concerned lest, when the bully recovered his senses, he would endeavor to get revenge upon Nalla, and so give them a great deal of trouble. But their fears were groundless.

It was not until late in the following day that he recovered from the effects of his downfall, and then he had the good sense to think only of returning to his work with as little delay as possible, so that no more was heard about the matter.

The Tambys were glad to leave Malaventure at an early hour the following morning. Owing to the interruption right in the middle of taking up the collection their receipts amounted to only a few francs, and the fright which Nadine got told upon her nerves so that it was several days before she entirely regained her normal serenity.

Pushing on steadily in the direction of Beaulieu they came to an ideal spot for a few days' rest. It was a snug little dell beside a clear running stream, and sheltered by a semicircle of thick-set trees.

"Cæsar," said Nadine, wrinkling her white forehead with a profound air of thought, "we have been working very hard this summer, and I think that before we get to Beaulieu, where we shall have to give two performances every day while the fair lasts, we ought to take a holiday—don't you think so, my brother?"

"Right you are, my dear!" cried Cæsar, delighted at the suggestion. "I'm just dead tired

of keeping on day after day like this. Let us stay here as long as we can, eh ?”

Of course Abel and Lydia gleefully concurred, and when Nalla and Steady were consulted, they clearly signified their approval, while Vigilant, divining that there was something to be joyful over, barked his best, and frisked about merrily. So the matter was settled, and permission having been obtained from the authorities of the village to which the chosen spot belonged, they prepared to spend several days in well-earned idleness.

CHAPTER X.

NALLA PLAYS PRANKS.

THE weather was glorious. By day the sun poured down his golden warmth from an almost unclouded sky, and by night the harvest moon at her full rode high in the heavens. The four children forgot all their sorrows and cares for the time. Thanks to their success at Morainville, and the good hopes they cherished of profitable patronage at Beaulieu, they felt no concern about finances. It was a case with them of eat—drink—sleep, sufficient for the day are the blessings thereof ; to-morrow can take care of itself.

Nadine was the only one who pretended to do any work, excepting of course that Cæsar looked after the feeding of Nalla, old Steady being able to look after himself as the grass was abundant in their vicinity.

Nadine, being the little housewife, in addition to having the daily meals upon her mind, found much necessary sewing to keep her clever fingers busy, and it was only when Cæsar would snatch the garment away from her, crying :

“Come, let that alone for a while, sister. You work quite too hard. You must play with us a little,” would she laughingly obey orders, and go off with the others for a romp or a ramble.

Of course their presence aroused the curiosity of the people in the neighborhood, and they had many visitors, who for the most part behaved very well, some indeed bringing them welcome presents of fruit and milk and butter, which were keenly appreciated.

As might be expected, they begged for a performance, and in view of their kind treatment, Nadine thought they could not very well refuse; so she promised that they would give one on the evening before their departure.

The happy restful days slipped by all too quickly, and the end of their short holiday was at hand.

“Oh dear!” sighed Cæsar. “This is our last day. We must be on the road again to-morrow if we would reach Beaulieu in time to get a good position. I do wish we could stay another week.”

“So do I,” chirped little Abel. “Why can’t we? It’s so nice here, and we needn’t be in such a hurry, surely.”

“But we do need,” responded Nadine, patting the little fellow affectionately on the head. “It

is important that we should get to the fair before the best places are taken, for we must make all the money there that we possibly can. The winter will soon be coming on, when we can't earn anything, you know."

Abel made a rueful grimace, but did not continue the argument. Nadine was right of course. She always was. Nobody could be wiser than Nadine. Yet there were times when it went against the grain to do everything just as she wished.

However, there was still a whole day left, so let them make the most of it. In the evening they would give their performance and the next morning they would resume their journey.

In the course of his roaming about the country, Cæsar had found a large deep pool not far down the stream from their camping-place, in which he had enjoyed sundry refreshing baths. It now occurred to him that it was just the place for another purpose.

"Look here, Nadine," said he, "old Nalla hasn't had a good bath for a long time, and I'm sure it would do him good. Suppose we take him down to the pool I've been bathing in, and let him have a dip in it. I'm sure he'd enjoy it immensely, and it would be good for him, too."

"I believe you're right, Cæsar," replied Nadine. "We will take him down there after dinner, and then he'll be in fine trim for the performance this evening."

Accordingly, right after dinner the whole family, accompanied by Vigilant, left Steady to his browsing, and went off down stream escorting Nalla, who trumpeted cheerfully in evident expectation of some sort of a treat."

When they reached the pool Cæsar, pointing to it, said :

"There, Nalla, is a splendid place for you to have a bath, such as you haven't had for a long time. In you go, old fellow, and enjoy yourself."

The elephant needed no urging. The day was hot, the flies troublesome, the water cool and inviting. With a blast of delight through his trunk, and a flapping of his great ears, he strode into the pool, and did not stop until the water had almost reached the top of his back. Then he gave himself up to the enjoyment of his bath with the most amusing abandon. He wallowed in the cool clear water without heed to the stirring up of the mud. He sank down in it, leaving only the tip of his trunk above the surface. He filled his trunk with the water, and blew it out

again, sending the muddy spray to a considerable distance—in fact, no schoolboy in a “swimming-hole” on a broiling midsummer day could have enjoyed himself more thoroughly.

The Tambys, seated in the shade on the bank, watched his antics with lively appreciation. Nothing was too good for Nalla in their opinion. They had no better friend than the faithful, docile elephant, and they loved him as deeply as an animal could be loved.

The time slipped by, and Nalla showed no signs of growing weary of his fun. He would come out into the shallower part of the pool at intervals and squirt the muddy water over his back and sides, and then he would plunge in again, going almost out of sight.

Presently Cæsar considered that he had enough of it, and that he ought to come out in order to be made ready for the parade through the village street, which would precede the performance. So he went to the edge of the pool, and said :

“Now, Nalla, you’ve had a grand time, and you’d better come out and get dried off, so come along, old fellow.”

Nalla looked at him with his absurdly small eyes, in which there surely lurked a mischievous twinkle, but made no move.

“Hurry up, you lazy chap!” called Cæsar laughingly. “Don’t be so slow. We have to prepare for the parade.”

Nalla manifestly understood what was wanted of him, but, instead of obeying, retreated further into the pool.

This angered Cæsar, whose temper was of the quickest, anyway, and he stamped his foot as he shouted :

“Here, now, no nonsense ! You must come out, and that right away. Do you hear ?”

Nalla, with admirably simulated reluctance, moved slowly shoreward, until he was within a few yards of Cæsar, and then, pointing his trunk at him, he squirted from it a quantity of muddy water that drenched and dirtied the boy from head to foot, and nearly knocked him over.

Almost blinded, and wholly enraged, Cæsar picked up a stick and threw it at the elephant with all his might. But he might as well have thrown it at the side of a house for all the effect it had on Nalla’s massive head. The cute little eyes only twinkled the more merrily, and their owner backed away again, as if he had changed his mind about coming ashore.

Cæsar was in a towering passion. The elephant had certainly added injury to insult, and had it

been in the boy's power to punish him severely, he would have delighted in doing it.

Nadine now felt it time to intervene.

"Let me try what I can do with Nalla," she said gently to Cæsar. "While you go back to the van and change your clothes. I am sure I can manage him."

Cæsar was very loath to confess himself beaten, and Nadine had to do some coaxing before she could get him to follow her suggestions. But at last, after another effort to make Nalla stir by abusing him vigorously, he gave up in despair, and went off to the van to put on dry clothes.

As soon as he had gone Nadine tried her hand. She went to the water's edge, for she felt sure Nalla would not treat her as he had done Cæsar, and stretching out her hand which contained a slice of bread left over from their lunch, said in her most winning tone :

"Come here, Nalla. I have a bit of bread for you, and I want you to leave the water. You've been in it quite long enough."

Nalla gave her a look that said plainly :

"I understand you perfectly, and of course you're right, so I suppose, now that I have had my fun, I may as well do what you wish."

So, slowly moving his vast bulk, he came to-

wards her, picked up the bread with his trunk, passed it into his cavernous mouth, and continued his way out of the water, until he stood on the grass, a very muddy, but very contented creature.

“You dear old thing !” cried Nadine, patting the end of his trunk affectionately. “I knew you’d obey me. You just love me, don’t you ? and I love you.”

Nalla returned the caress after his own fashion, and then, without another word, proceeded back to the van, his whole gait and manner expressing the utmost good-humor. He had had his fun, and he was now ready to return to duty.

By the time they had all returned to the camping-place, Cæsar had quite recovered his equanimity, and joined heartily in the laughter at Nalla’s impertinence.

“He got the best of me that time, and no mistake,” he said ; “but I’ll be even with him yet, see if I’m not !”

They made haste to deck themselves out for the parade, and spent an hour marching up and down the village street, while Cæsar from the howdah on Nalla’s back, called out the place and time of the performance.

Then back to the van for supper, and after supper a general move into the village where they

found a capital location, in a small square beside the town-hall.

“We shall no doubt have a good crowd,” Nadine remarked thoughtfully, when the simple preparations had been completed, “for the people have certainly taken a lot of interest in us, and have been very kind too, but perhaps they may not have much money to spare. They don’t seem to be rich around here.”

“It won’t be another Morainville, that’s certain,” said Cæsar, shaking his head dolefully. “Such luck as we had there doesn’t come often. But,” he added, straightening himself up, and looking more cheerful, “we’ll give them the best performance we can, and hope that they will give us all the money they can, eh?”

The villagers began to gather early, and by the time the performance opened every seat was filled with women and girls, while a crowd of men and boys stood up behind, or squatted upon the ground wherever a clear view of the stage could be obtained.

One after another the different acts were given, and warmly received. A more appreciative gathering could hardly have been desired. Cæsar’s juggling, Nadine’s singing, the animals’ acting, and Lydia’s dancing were all enthusiastically

encored. But when the little bowl appeared a marked change came over the spirit of the spectators. They not only grew indifferent very suddenly, but actually seemed anxious to slip away.

This was not a new experience for the Tambys, and hitherto they had been content to take it silently, but this time Cæsar's blood was stirred. He had not counted upon any such meanness, and the indignation it aroused gave him courage to do what he had never done before.

Springing upon the stage he called for attention with an emphatic gesture, and, when all eyes were turned upon him, he began an address to the assemblage.

“My friends,” he said, “you have done us the honor to attend our simple performance, and you have shown by your applause that it has pleased you. Now you must know that we do not give these performances for our own amusement, but to gain our daily bread. We are by no means well-off even if we do possess an elephant and a horse. We need every sou that we can earn to pay for the food of our animals and ourselves, and to meet our other needs. If you have enjoyed our performance so much we would like you to show it not only by applauding, but by putting into the bowl which my little sister is about to

pass around, what you can spare us. We do not expect silver from everybody, you know," he added with a humorous twinkle of his eyes. "We are glad to get copper—if there is only enough of it."

This clever little speech, delivered in a clear voice, and without the slightest suggestion of presumption, touched the listeners in the right way. It opened both their hearts and their pockets, and when Lydia went her rounds amongst them they responded in a most creditable manner, so that the receipts were enough to cover a whole week's expenses.

Nadine was particularly pleased at this, because it enabled them to push right on to Beaulieu without halting to give performances *en route*. Their holiday therefore was an unalloyed success, and, thoroughly refreshed by it, they kept on day after day until at last they reached Beaulieu, a whole day before the opening of the fair, and in ample time to secure an excellent position for their van, where it could not fail to attract attention, and so insure no lack of spectators when they gave their performances.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE BEAULIEU FAIR.

A COUNTRY FAIR was no novelty to the Tambys. They had attended too many of them already in their young lives to get excited over the inevitable bustle and confusion. Their chief concern was not to see everybody and everything, but to attract as large gatherings as possible to their performances, and induce them to give liberally when the little bowl was passed around.

This time they felt full of hope. They were greatly benefited by the brief holiday, and they were thoroughly satisfied with the location they had secured, and so on the opening day of the fair, after having carefully locked up the van, and seen to it that Nalla and Steady were securely tethered, they left Vigilant in charge of their property while all four of them made a tour of the streets which were given up to the fair.

In this they had a double purpose. They would "see the sights," and they would also get a good

idea of what were the rival attractions with which they must needs contend for the patronage of the people.

They found the streets thick-set with booths displaying all sorts of small-wares, and thronged with light-hearted folk, who, if they had not much money to spend, would at all events get the full value of every sou with which they parted. It was neither a brilliant nor a costly display, but it was quite attractive notwithstanding, and the two younger Tambys saw many things that they very much wanted to purchase.

Now it would be Abel, and then again Lydia, dragging Nadine or Cæsar up to some booth, and eagerly indicating the object that caught their fancy.

But their cutest coaxings were for the most part in vain. It was to earn money, and not to spend it, that they had come to the fair, and beyond the purchase of a few inexpensive trifles Nadine would not be persuaded.

“No, no, my dears,” was her firm though gentle reply. “All our money must go for necessities. We have none to spend upon things we don’t really need. I wish very much we could afford to spend twenty francs or even more on the pretty things we see in the booths, but if we did

we might have to go hungry, and we wouldn't like that, would we, little ones ? ”

Of course they had to submit as cheerfully as they could manage. It was no use pouting or sulking, and indeed they yielded to their elder sister's rule with uniformly good grace.

Having completed their tour of inspection, and satisfied themselves that, although there would be no lack of competition for popular favor, they stood a good chance of reaping a fair share of the harvest of coin to be distributed by the pleasure-seekers, they returned to where they had left their van.

To their acute amazement and consternation the familiar weather-worn house on wheels, which contained all their possessions, save the three animals, had disappeared, and in its place was another, larger, and newer, painted in glaring gaudy colors, and having a general air of vulgar audacity.

“ Why, Cæsar ! ” cried Nadine, her fine eyes wide with alarm, and her heart beating fast. “ What can this mean ? Who has taken away our van, and put another in its place ? ”

Cæsar understood the situation at a glance. The owners of the other van, finding the location which they had in view already taken,

and learning that it was only four children who owned the shabby old affair that stood there, had had the audacity to put Steady into the shafts, and remove the van out of their way while they put their own in its place.

Burning with indignation he went up to the van, and knocked at the closed door. After some delay it was opened by a large black-bearded rough-looking man, who demanded with an oath what the boy wanted.

Undismayed by the ruffianly appearance of the fellow, Cæsar spoke up stoutly :

“What have you done with our van, and what right had you to take it away, and put yours in its place?”

Removing a cigarette from his lips the man sent a puff of smoke right into Cæsar’s face, and then, with an insolent chuckle, said :

“Well, my young cock, and what are you going to do about it?”

Half-blinded and choked by the foul reek of the coarse tobacco, and roused to fury by the ruffian’s insolence, Cæsar for a moment could not speak. When he did find words it was to pour out his wrath in language so biting that the man was angered in his turn, and he made as though he would strike the boy, but checked himself when

Nadine screamed, and darted in between them, crying :

“Come away, Cæsar. It’s no use quarreling with that fellow. We must find the gendarme. He will get us our place back again.”

The man grunted scornfully. What cared he for their threat? He had the place now, and they would find it no easy matter to dislodge him.

The first thing, of course, was to find their van and animals. These were presently discovered in an obscure lane not far away, none the worse for their being moved. While assuring himself that everything was intact a daring idea flashed into Cæsar’s brain. To appeal to the authorities would mean delay, and perhaps disappointment in the end, as they might have difficulty in establishing their prior right to the location. But there was another way of regaining their rights. The intruders had taken the law into their own hands, why should not the Tambys do likewise?

He at once unfolded his scheme to Nadine.

“Oh, no, Cæsar!” she exclaimed. “Don’t try that. You’d certainly get into a big row. He is such a bad looking fellow.”

But Cæsar was determined. They had the right on their side, and he felt confident that if

there was a row, and a crowd gathered, that the sympathy would be with them, not with the ruffian, and they would regain their place.

So, with many misgivings, Nadine consented, and they set to work at once. Steady was put into the shafts, and the van, followed by Nalla, drawn back into the square.

Then Cæsar mounted the elephant. The man had gone back into his van, and closed the door. Obeying his young master's orders as accurately as if he had possessed human intelligence, Nalla seized the shaft of the intruding van, and began to pull it out into the center of the square.

At the first movement the man flung open the door, swearing furiously, and shouting out :

“What are you doing? Leave my van alone! How dare you interfere with it?”

When he saw how it was being moved, however, he made no demonstrations against the elephant. He was altogether too big an antagonist. It was a case where discretion was decidedly the better part of valor.

But he abused Cæsar in the vilest language, striving to terrify him by the sheer violence of his threats.

Cæsar, securely seated upon Nalla's neck, only laughed at him, while, without pausing, the ele-



NALLA SEIZED THE SHAFT OF THE INTRUDING VAN.

phant tugged away at the van until it was drawn well out into the middle of the square.

By this time quite a crowd of spectators had gathered, and, Nadine having in her own vivacious way explained what it all meant, they unani- mously took her side. If the infuriated owner of the van had attempted to resort to violent measures he would assuredly have found himself mobbed in short order.

The space being now clear, Cæsar slipped down from Nalla's neck, and bidding the sagacious monster stand in front of the strange van in readiness to check any action on the part of its proprietor, he took hold of Steady's bridle, and proceeded to put his van into its former position amidst the approving laughter of the crowd.

Almost beside himself with rage the owner of the other van rushed at Cæsar with fists clenched intending to pummel him. But before he could reach him Nalla's long supple trunk swept his legs from under him, and sent him headlong, whilst the spectators roared with delight at his ignominious downfall.

Like all bullies he was in reality a coward, and, it being very plain that everything was against him, he submitted to defeat with a very bad grace to be sure, but without any further attempt at

reprisals. Procuring his own horses he hitched them to the van, and drew it away to another part of the town, vowing vengeance against the youngsters who had thus dared to expose and discomfit him.

Nadine felt worried over the affair, but Cæsar made light of it.

“We’ll see no more of that rascal,” he said, confidently. “He knows he’s killed himself in this place by his mean trick, and instead of doing us harm he has really done us good, for he has got the people interested in us, and they will be all the more likely to come to the performance.”

Cæsar was right enough in this. As was the case when the mischievous students stampeded Nalla, an apparent misfortune turned out a benefit. The episode with the man of the black beard, and the brave way in which the young people had borne themselves, as also the wonderful intelligence shown by Nalla, proved an admirable advertisement, and their first performance was anticipated with much interest.

Relying upon a larger patronage than they were wont to have at their ordinary stopping-places, they thought it wise to hire half a hundred chairs, for which they would charge ten

sous each, five sous being asked for a seat upon the planks, and standing room being free.

Before the hour announced for opening the people had already begun to gather, and by seven o'clock every seat was occupied, and a goodly number were standing behind them. They were all in the best of humor, and prepared to enjoy themselves by heartily appreciating what the Tamby family had provided for them.

This good fortune attended them throughout the whole week of the fair. Nadine's sweet singing, Cæsar's clever juggling, the amusing antics of Vigilant, and the remarkable intelligence displayed by Nalla and Steady maintained their interest for the populace to the end, and when on Saturday night, tired out but happy, they counted up their profits after the payment of all expenses, they found that they had no less than five hundred francs to the good.

"Why, that is a small fortune, isn't it, Nadine?" exclaimed Cæsar joyously. "That will help us over the winter finely, and we will doubtless make more before the season ends, eh?"

"I hope we will," responded Nadine, her charming face radiant at the handsome result of their week's work. "We'll need it all before spring, and we must be very careful how we

spend what we have. It won't do to be extravagant because it seems such a big sum of money to have at once. But what was that?" she cried, her face suddenly growing grave. "Did you see anything, Cæsar?"

"No," replied Cæsar, looking all about him. "I saw nothing—what was it startled you?"

"I may be mistaken," answered Nadine, speaking in a steadier tone, "but I thought I saw a face peering in at the window just as I was putting the money away, and it frightened me a little. It would be dreadful if any one tried to rob us of our money, wouldn't it?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE RASCAL'S REVENGE.

CÆSAR'S laughing face grew serious at what Nadine said.

“That is so, Nadine,” he responded. “I hadn't thought of it before. Doubtless it is well known that our performances have been very successful, and that we have taken in a good deal of money, and it may be that some of the other mountebanks who have been less fortunate would like very well to rob us of the results of our hard work.”

“Oh! Cæsar, you make me nervous!” cried Nadine with a pretty shiver. “What can we do to protect ourselves?”

“Tut! sister, I'm not in earnest,” rejoined Cæsar smilingly. “There's nothing to be afraid of. There are only honest people round about us. The next vans to ours are occupied by the performers of the Sito circus, and none of them would think of doing anything so mean. Nevertheless, just to make your mind easy, I will keep

guard to-night, and at the first sign of anything suspicious I will give the alarm."

"I'm very sorry that we've had to put Nalla away off there with the circus animals," said Nadine in a tone of regret. "If he were only right beside our van we needn't worry at all, for he'd take care that no bad character got too near us."

"Yes, indeed," replied Cæsar. "With Nalla on guard we could sleep as soundly as we pleased."

"Look here, Cæsar," exclaimed Nadine, her face brightened by a happy thought which had just come to her. "I know what we can do. As soon as we have had our supper the whole four of us can go down where Nalla is, and sleep there under his protection. What do you say to that?"

"A capital idea, sister," answered Cæsar. "If we were quite sure that there is any real danger. But you see we are not, and if we leave our van and go down to the stables for the night the people might suspect us of some evil intentions. No—no—we will all stay here, and I will be sentinel while the rest of you sleep comfortably."

Considering all the hard work and the excitement that Cæsar had been having it was certainly very unselfish on his part—especially as he really felt no anxiety—to undertake to keep awake all

night, and Nadine, striving to throw off the depressing nervousness which had come upon her, declared that it really was not necessary, that she would put the bag of money under her pillow, where it could not be touched without awaking her, and that Cæsar must go to bed like the rest, or she would sit up to keep him company.

The result of it was that they succeeded in reassuring one another so completely as to decide that no one should remain on guard, and in excellent spirits they sat down to their supper, for which they had all the best of appetites.

It was a capital supper, too, as Nadine, the careful little housewife, felt justified by their extra earnings during the week in providing something better than their ordinary fare. So the table showed a plump roast chicken, a succulent salad, a large loaf of white bread with a fine brown crust, a generous pat of golden butter, and a steaming pot of fragrant coffee.

The four young people ate and drank and talked with all their might. Everything was delicious except the coffee, that had a strange taste to which Cæsar was the first to call attention.

“Why, Nadine!” he exclaimed after swallowing half-a-cupful at one draught. “What’s the matter with the coffee? It tastes so queer.”

Nadine had noticed it herself, but, supposing it was just some little mistake in the brewing, had said nothing, and gone on drinking it, while Abel and Lydia were too keen of appetite to be particular.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” replied Nadine, being thus challenged, and feeling that her culinary reputation was at stake. “I made it myself, and I didn’t notice anything different from other times. Perhaps there is too much chicory in it.”

“That may be it,” returned Cæsar. “Anyway I’m too thirsty to bother. I’ll just finish off my share.”

No sooner was the meal finished than Lydia, who seemed particularly tired, sat down on the floor beside Nadine’s chair, and letting her head droop upon her little mother’s knee, fell fast asleep.

“Poor little pet,” murmured Nadine, fondling the golden curls. “Just see, Cæsar, how tired Lydia is! The sand-man has taken her by surprise. Indeed my own head feels very heavy.”

“That’s because we’ve been working so hard,” responded Cæsar. “We’re just tired out, all of us. Why, look at Abel—he’s gone to sleep in his chair, and I don’t wonder at him, I feel completely played out myself.”

“I must hurry and undress the little ones and put them to bed,” said Nadine, giving a great yawn, and making an effort to open wide her heavy-lidded eyes.

“Dear me! But how sleepy I feel. I can scarcely hold my head up.”

“No more can I,” drawled Cæsar drowsily as he dropped into a chair where a moment later he was sound asleep, while Nadine, without accomplishing what she had in mind, quickly followed his example, so that long ere midnight the whole four children were sunk in a profound slumber that could hardly have been due merely to natural fatigue.

It was a still dark night without a star showing in the heavens, and the camp of the mountebanks was as silent as a graveyard. Not a light shone in any of the other vans. Tired out by their week's work the occupants slept as sound as logs.

About one o'clock, two dark forms glided as noiselessly as shadows towards the Tamby van, and on getting close to it, halted to listen intently for a moment.

“Are you sure of your work, Fritsch?” whispered one in a deep voice to the other.

“Perfectly sure, Wilhelm,” was the cautiously spoken reply. “I gave them a dose that would

keep them asleep until nine o'clock anyway, and by that time I will have such a long start that they will never overtake me."

It was, in fact, the man who had put his van in the place the Tambys had first taken, and who, on being compelled to get out again, had determined to be revenged. Aided by his partner, he was now about to carry out his nefarious design, having succeeded in drugging the coffee they had drunk at their supper, so that they were almost insensible, and perfectly helpless.

"Very well, then," said Wilhelm, "let us go ahead, and you understand that we will meet you in the forest of Trefflieu three days hence."

Fritsch glanced anxiously about in every direction, and bent his ear to listen for the slightest sound.

"You hear nothing, eh?" he whispered to his accomplice.

"No—nothing. The coast is clear, hurry up!" responded the other.

Moving stealthily Fritsch ascended the steps of the van, and, finding the door unfastened, for sleep had come upon the occupants too suddenly for them to shut and bolt it as was their custom, he slipped inside, making his way with utmost caution. The lamp still burned dimly, and by

its light he could find at once that for which he had come. He was busy only for a moment, and then he reappeared at the door bearing in his arms a large bundle wrapped in a shawl.

"I have her all right," said he in a hoarse whisper, his evil face lit up with a triumphant smile.

"Bravo!" muttered the other, and the next moment the two scoundrels disappeared in the darkness.

They went together as far as the gaudy van, into which one of them entered, while the other, carrying his burden, walked rapidly away out into the country over the silent deserted roads.

The day dawned, and at an early hour the occupants of the other vans began to bestir themselves. The fair was over. There were no more performances to be given. They were free to do as they pleased. Each party had its own plans. This one would hurry off to another place, and continue the campaign. That one would take a few days' rest in some quiet spot. One was going north, and another south. But they were all going somewhere. It was no use staying any longer at Beaulieu, nor coming back there again until next year.

In the midst of all this bustle, however, there

was no sign of life about the Tamby van. Although it was after eight o'clock they still slept on when they were wont to be up and about at six.

Meanwhile, Nalla over at the stables was calling for his young owners with persistent and ear-splitting trumpeting. The sagacious creature knew very well that this tardiness was something altogether out of the usual, and he proclaimed his anxiety to the world. He was saying as plainly as he could :

“There must be something wrong. Won't somebody find out what it is? I never knew Cæsar and Abel to be so late giving me my breakfast.”

“Why—what can be the matter with that big brute?” the other mountebanks asked impatiently. “He's making such a tremendous row !” But none of them were wise enough to catch his meaning, and institute inquiry.

Finally, about nine o'clock, Cæsar awoke, feeling very stupid, and having a dull headache. He rubbed his eyes, yawned widely, and looked about him. There were Nadine and Abel, still sound asleep beside the table with their heads pillowed upon their arms. Evidently no one had gone to bed. But where was Lydia ?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW.

THE absence of his sister did not at first alarm Cæsar, because he took it for granted she had awakened earlier than the rest, and had gone outside to get the fresh air. So he rose from his seat, stretched himself, yawned once more mightily, and went out quietly, thinking that he would look for Lydia before arousing Nadine.

To his surprise he found the square almost deserted, and no sign of Lydia. This made him uneasy, and, re-entering the van, he shook Nadine gently, calling out :

“Nadine ! Nadine ! Wake up, it’s after nine o’clock !”

Nadine opened her eyes slowly and painfully.

“Nine o’clock,” she repeated after him in a dreamy fashion.

“Yes, nine o’clock !” reiterated Cæsar, “and how was it that none of us went to bed ?”

At this Nadine sprang to her feet, thoroughly awake.

“ Why, neither we did ! How extraordinary ! We were so tired out that we just fell asleep in our chairs. You wake up Abel while I go and see where Lydia is.”

“ Do you hear Nalla calling ? ” Cæsar asked. “ The poor fellow must think we’re all dead. We never left him so late without attention before.”

“ Indeed, I do hear him,” responded Nadine, a bewildered look on her face. “ It is certainly very strange. I cannot understand it at all.”

She had been moving about while she was speaking, putting things to rights with deft feminine skill, when suddenly she stopped, the color left her face, her eyes started from their sockets, she staggered as though she would fall, but steadied herself against the table as she shrieked :

“ Cæsar ! Cæsar ! We have been robbed ! ”

“ Robbed ! ” Cæsar echoed, darting forward to her side. “ What do you mean ? ”

“ Why, our money, it is all gone ! ” wailed Nadine. “ You know I put it all back into the bag after we had counted it, and was going to hide it in my bed when Lydia fell asleep beside me, and a few minutes after I went to sleep too. I must have left it upon the table, and some

wicked thief has crept in and stolen it. Oh dear ! oh dear ! what shall we do ? All our money stolen !” and throwing herself down upon the table she sobbed as though her heart would break.

Cæsar, although he was appalled himself at this cruel misfortune, did his best to comfort her, and he and Abel almost turned the interior of the van upside down in a vain endeavor to find the missing bag.

“ I’m afraid it has been stolen,” he confessed at last. “ There’s not a trace of it, Come, Nadine, let us be brave. We may get it all back again. Do you hunt up Lydia, while I go and find one of the gendarmes and tell him what has happened to us.”

In the extremity of her grief at the loss of the money, Nadine had for the time forgotten her little sister, but the moment Cæsar reminded her of Lydia she sprang to her feet, dashed away her tears with her hands, and choking back her sobs, ran out into the square, crying :

“ Lydia ! Lydia ! where are you ? ”

But no response came in Lydia’s sweet voice, for at that moment the poor child was far away, hidden in a thick wood, and watched over by a wretch who threatened to kill her if she made the least outcry, so that she dared not utter a sound,

although there was no stopping the tears that poured down her cheeks. The scoundrels had stolen both the money and the child, the beauty and grace of the latter being so marked that they coveted her for their own business, knowing well how strong an attraction she would be.

At this moment M. Sito, manager of the circus with whose animals Nalla and Steady had been stabled, happened along, and seeing that the children were in some grievous trouble, kindly inquired what was the matter, and if he could be of any assistance.

When Nadine apprised him of Lydia's mysterious disappearance he knitted his brows, and thought deeply for a moment. He had noted the pretty child, and had himself entertained the thought that she might easily be trained to be a great success in the circus, and knowing only too well how many evil characters there had been in the town during the fair, his quick intelligence carried him to the right conclusion.

But he would not let his suspicions be known to Nadine until they were confirmed. Adopting, therefore, an air of cheerful confidence, he said, patting Nadine encouragingly :

“ Don't worry. Lydia is not far off. She has perhaps gone for a stroll through the streets and

has lost her way. We will go and look for her, eh?"

Just then Cæsar returned accompanied by two gendarmes to whom Nadine at once addressed herself, explaining her great trouble as best she could in spite of the sobs that choked her utterance.

The brigadier, a tall handsome man, who had not, however, a good expression, twirled his superb mustache with a grand air as he said in a patronizing tone :

"Is it all true what you have been telling me? I give you warning that we gendarmes are not to be trifled with. It will go hard with you if you are making a great deal out of nothing. You assert that some one has taken away your little sister, and robbed you of all your money?"

"It is unhappily only too true," responded Nadine with a fresh burst of tears. "Won't you help us recover them? Oh! It is dreadful!"

"Wait now, my girl," said the brigadier, looking very important. "Don't be so impatient. You must first answer me some questions. And, mind you, answer them correctly. You need not try to deceive the authorities."

Nadine dried her tears, checked her sobs, and faced the man with a frank, fearless countenance.

There was no reason why she should conceal anything. She was ready to answer any proper question.

“First of all,” began the brigadier. “Where are your parents?”

“Alas! we are orphans,” was the reply given in a low tone.

“That is not what I asked you,” retorted the officer sharply. “Where are your parents?”

“We have no parents,” responded Nadine, the tears returning to her eyes. “We are orphans, as I told you.”

“Durien,” said the brigadier to the other gendarme, who had produced a note-book, “write that down—orphans.”

“It is put down, brigadier.”

“And how do you support yourselves?” was the next question.

“We are mountebanks,” answered Nadine, “and we give performances with the assistance of our animals.”

“With the assistance of your animals, you say! Then you have animals also. What are they, and where are they?”

Just then Cæsar came from the stables leading Nalla and Steady, and followed by Vigilant, who had as usual slept beside Nalla.

“There they are,” replied Nadine, pointing to the approaching trio.

The brigadier regarded them with surprise.

“Why, that is a costly animal for orphans to own!” he exclaimed. “How do you manage to provide for his keep?”

“With what we earn, sir,” answered Nadine. “He is our best breadwinner too.”

“Hum! hum! with what you earn,” sneered the brigadier, “and with what you steal also, of course.”

Nadine paled at the cruel words, and shrunk back from the speaker as though he had struck her. She was so hurt that she could not find words in which to reply.

But Cæsar, thrilled with indignation at the unmerited slur upon their character, spoke up bravely :

“Mr. Gendarme,” he said, “we are honest folk, I would have you know, and you have no right to insult us like that, and to add to my sister’s trouble when she has so much to bear already.”

The brigadier grew angry at once because a mere boy had the audacity to speak so to one of such importance as himself.

“Hold your tongue, you brat!” he shouted.

“How dare you speak to me. You are showing disrespect to the law.”

“Mr. Gendarme,” responded Cæsar in a submissive tone, and bowing humbly before the great man. “I beg your pardon. I had no intention of being insolent, I assure you. I do beg your pardon, sir.”

The brigadier became more gracious. Cæsar’s politic apology appeased his wrath.

“’Tis well, youngster,” he growled, as he gave his big mustache a ferocious twist. “In view of your age, and of the humble apology you have made, I pardon you, but don’t presume to speak until you are asked. Now, Durien,” he called to the other gendarme, “we will make a search of the vans there,” pointing out those belonging to the other mountebanks which still remained.

But their search had no result, and the brigadier then announced that Nadine, Cæsar, and Abel must accompany him to the town-hall, where the sous-préfet would examine them before giving orders for a more thorough search about the neighborhood.

This announcement distressed Nadine greatly.

“Oh, sir !” she pleaded, “don’t do that ! Leave us free to look for Lydia without losing another

minute, or it will soon be too late. If she has been carried off by evil men they are getting farther away all the time, and we shan't be able to overtake them. Oh, please let us alone, so that we may do our best to find her !”

But the brigadier was obdurate. Having once made known what in his great wisdom he thought the proper course to pursue, he was not to be turned aside from it by a mere chit of a girl.

So, drawing himself up to his full height, and twirling his mustache in what he no doubt considered a very stylish fashion, he said :

“I have no power to continue the search any further at present. I must receive instructions from the sous-préfet, and before these can be given it is necessary that you should make a deposition.”

Poor Nadine got bewildered. She was not familiar with the words used by the gendarme, and did not understand what that implied. If he had said, “You must deposit some money,” she would have understood it at once, but “you must make a deposition”—what could that be ?

Just then she remembered the envelope that kind Madame Pradère had given her with the injunction that she was not to open it until some time when she was in great difficulties. Surely

that time had come. She could hardly be in a more trying situation than she was with her darling sister vanished, her money stolen, and this heartless gendarme insisting that she must go before the authorities, and make a deposition :

Slipping her hand into her bosom she drew out the precious envelope. It had not been stolen because she never parted with it.

“See, Cæsar,” she said softly to her brother. “This is what good Madame Pradère gave me when I bade her ‘Good-bye.’ She said I wasn’t to open it until I was in great trouble. Hadn’t I better open it now ?”

“Certainly,” responded Cæsar. “This is indeed the time. I wonder what it can contain ?”

His curiosity was soon changed to amazement, and then to joy, for when Nadine broke the seal, and opened the envelope, there were two bank-notes of a hundred francs each !

“Whew !” he exclaimed. “Isn’t that fine ? Why, that’s a lot of money. Nearly one-half of what we have lost.”

Nadine’s sad face brightened at the sight of the bank-notes. They might get them out of all their difficulties, and help them to find Lydia. Holding them in her hands she said to the gendarme :

“Now, sir, what will there be to pay ?”

But the rude fellow gave a significant wink at his companion as he said :

“Ah ! ha ! young lady, a moment ago you were pretending that you had been robbed of all your money, and now you bring out bank-notes for a large amount with which to try and bribe the gendarmes ! You have been trying to deceive us. Very well—we shall see. You must at once tell us where you got that money.”

“This money,” faltered Nadine, not yet recovered from her surprise and joy at its discovery. “was given me by a very kind-hearted lady who told me I was not to use it until I was in great trouble.”

“Oh ! yes, of course,” sneered the insolent creature. “We know lots of kind-hearted ladies who are in the way of giving one hundred franc notes to strolling performers, don’t we ? We shall have to clear all this up. I shall take charge of that money in order to restore it to the proper owner. And now, without wasting any more words, do you put your things in order right away, and come with me to the sous-préfet right away, where, without being impertinent, you shall explain to the authorities the meaning of all this. Get to work now. No more excuses. I have taken too much time with you already.

CHAPTER XIV.

BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE.

NEITHER tears nor entreaties had any effect upon the brigadier, and a little later the van of the Tamby family, with a gendarme at either side, was on its way to the court-house.

Nalla, his trunk hanging down despondently, and giving vent to groanings that strongly resembled sobs, followed in the rear, apparently understanding and sharing in the overwhelming trouble of his young owners.

The sous-préfet was a stern old man, having a high sense of his own importance, and of the dignity of the law which he represented.

He listened gravely to the report of the brigadier, who added many embellishments to the actual facts in making it, and, deciding that the case was one which would require careful investigation, directed that the children should be kept in confinement until he was at leisure to give their matter due attention.

And so behold the three of them without having done the slightest harm, but on the contrary been the victims of the cruelest wrong, put in prison just as if they were malefactors !

Poor old Nalla, sorely perplexed at the whole proceeding, followed them to the prison, and would have liked to enter with them. But as that, of course, was not possible, he took up his station beside the door, swaying his trunk and groaning in a piteous fashion.

Thus it came about, through the irony of fate, that the money which the well-meaning Madame Pradère had, in the goodness of her heart, given the Tamby children to be a help to them at some critical time, had only served to add to their trouble. Because of its possession they were imprisoned as thieves.

The brigadier, on finding such an amount as two hundred francs in the hands of Nadine after the girl had complained to him of having been robbed of all her money, suspected that there was something wrong. Her explanation that it was a gift from a charitable lady seemed to him very fishy, to say the least.

“These young vagabonds,” he reasoned, “have stolen that money, and we shall presently find out the truth about it. When the sous-préfet

examines them they will be made to tell everything."

It is needless to say that that was a dreadful night for the poor young Tambys. They spent it in weeping and lamenting their cruel fate, which they could not understand that they had in any way deserved, although Nadine, the dear innocent, seemed to think that she was in some way to blame.

"Didn't I promise," she wailed, "when our father died, that, being the eldest, I would take such care of you, and yet I have allowed Lydia, our little one, who has so much need of a mother, to be carried off, the good God only knows where!"

"Don't blame yourself, Nadine," said Cæsar soothingly, putting his arm affectionately around her. "We shall find her again, never fear. If it costs my life I shall get her back again."

He was a sturdy high-spirited chap, Cæsar, and although younger than Nadine, now that she was so overcome with grief, he took upon himself the part of comforter and champion.

But poor little Abel buried his head in her lap, sobbing piteously, and murmuring "Lydia—Lydia—where is my sister, Lydia?"

It was not until ten o'clock in the morning that

the key grated in the lock of the massive door, which on opening disclosed the portly figure of the brigadier.

“Now, then,” he said in his deep rough voice, “come along with me. The sous-préfet has arrived, and is awaiting you, and he will attend to your affair. I give you warning beforehand that it will be useless for you to attempt to deceive him. The sous-préfet is a very clever man, and has no pity for tramps who boldly tell lies.”

These cruel words stung Nadine and Cæsar so that they found it hard to keep back a retort, but they looked at each other in a significant way, and in silence followed the bullying brigadier.

Patiently awaiting them at the door of the prison were Vigilant and Nalla. The former, as soon as he perceived his young owners, set up a joyous barking and gamboling about them, showing his affection and delight. Nalla, on his part, waved his trunk up and down, and indulged in funny rumblings which were expressive of his gladness at seeing them again.

“Stay there!” commanded the brigadier sternly, but the elephant took no notice of him, and ambled along behind the children.

It was Sunday morning, and the streets of the town of Beaulieu were full of people, many of them being farming folk from the neighborhood, who had come in to attend church, and through the midst of this curious crowd the unfortunate Tamby children, their faces crimsoned with shame, were compelled to pass in charge of two gendarmes, just as if they were criminals.

When they reached the entrance of the courthouse, Nadine turned to Nalla, and, patting his trunk tenderly, said :

“Dear old friend, you must be very wise now, very wise indeed, lest some fresh trouble come upon us.”

And while Nalla responded with his queer grunting, Nadine saw that he too had his anxieties. He turned his huge head from right to left, looking at the children with his bright little eyes in an inquiring way. The fact of the matter was that the old fellow was seeking for his little pet, Lydia. He could not understand her absence from the group, and he wanted the others to explain it to him. But that was just what they could not do.

The sous-préfet at Beaulieu was a retired army officer, who had brought with him from the service a very stern and imperious manner. He

had a white mustache and beard, and bushy white eyebrows, which gave him such a cross look, one could not expect to receive much courtesy or consideration at his hands.

He was busy at a desk littered with papers when the brigadier brought the Tambys before him. At first sight of him the children were filled with fear, his whole appearance was so severe.

"Your Honor," said the brigadier, "I bring the prisoners before you."

"Very well, wait there!" was the sharp reply, given without looking up from the paper, at which he continued to write.

"Wait here!" the brigadier repeated to the children, who certainly had no thought of stirring, however glad they would have been to do so.

For several minutes there was no sound save the scratching of the magistrate's pen as he wrote busily without taking any notice whatever of the Tambys.

After a little he began to question the brigadier, and to put down his answers in writing. The brigadier told his story at length, and with many big words, being evidently anxious to make as much of it as possible.

When he had at last finished, the magistrate

turned his fierce eyes upon the children, and scrutinized them sharply :

“ But where are their parents ? ” he demanded sternly.

“ The little vagabonds insist upon it that they have none,” replied the gendarme.

“ That they have none ! ” exclaimed the magistrate. “ Are they traveling about alone ? ”

“ The young rascals pretend that they have lost their father and mother,” continued the brigadier.

The magistrate gave the children a piercing glance. He evidently was not disposed to credit their ability to take care of themselves.

“ Come here, young girl ! ” he commanded Nadine, and when she had stepped up to his desk he went on : “ And so you declare that somebody has taken away your sister at the Beaulieu fair ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” Nadine replied.

“ And what is your sister’s age ? ” he inquired.

“ She is six years old, sir.”

“ Could it not be on account of your unkind treatment of her that your sister ran away ? ” was the next query.

Poor Nadine flushed to the roots of her hair, and her eye flashed indignantly at this contemptible insinuation from the magistrate.

“Unkind treatment!” she cried, her voice quivering with anger. “I never treated Lydia unkindly, as any one who knows about us can tell you. I have always done my best to be as tender with her as our dear mother would have been. I can assure you, sir, that Lydia is as fond of us as we are of her. We all four love each other dearly, and we are very happy together, and the idea of her leaving us of her own accord is absurd. She must have been taken away by some evil person—and only the good God knows what they will do with her.” Here her indignation changed to grief, and covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

The stern old magistrate, instead of being convinced by the manifest sincerity and truthfulness of the young girl, shook his head, as though to say :

“That’s all very fine, but I don’t put much faith in it,” and after a pause put another question.

“Was not your sister of a very headstrong nature?”

“Indeed she was not,” sobbed Nadine, “she was always most affectionate and gentle, and perfectly obedient.”

“We will see about that,” grunted the magis-

trate, looking rather dissatisfied at the result of his examination thus far.

He was silent for a time while he fiddled with the papers on his desk, and then he recommenced his questions.

“You pretend also that you have been robbed of all the money you possessed while you were asleep, and you add that that sleep was not natural, but was caused by being drugged? Is that the case?”

“That is what I have told, sir, and it is the very truth,” answered Nadine firmly, for she had now recovered herself.

“A pretty story, truly,” retorted the magistrate, harshly, “and one that speaks volumes for your imagination. But there is another part of your story which is even more preposterous. You assert that a kind-hearted lady gave you two hundred francs about a month ago?”

“I swear to you that this is true!” exclaimed Nadine. “When Madame Pradère gave me the envelope I did not know what was in it, because she impressed upon me that I must not open it until I was in very great trouble. So I kept it carefully, and did not open it, as we were doing very well with our performances, and had no trouble until this came to us. Then I thought of

what she had told me, and opened the envelope when the gendarmes were present."

"Young girl," said the magistrate solemnly, "in your interest I enjoin you to make a full confession of the real truth without any longer attempting to mislead the law. Take my word for it, you must not try to speak falsely as to things which sooner or later must be found out, if you would hope for the consideration of the authorities before whom you are brought. So now, my child, think well, and be perfectly frank with me. This is no doubt only a temporary giving away to wrong. You were strongly tempted, and you succumbed to the temptation by taking money which was not your own. Tell me all, my child. Where did you get that money?"

CHAPTER XV.

NALLA OBTAINS ASSISTANCE.

POOR unhappy Nadine could stand it no longer ! The persistent incredulity of the magistrate cut her to the heart. It was bad enough to have lost her darling sister, and all her money, but in addition to that to be treated like a criminal instead of finding sympathy and assistance, truly it was more than flesh and blood could bear. She sank fainting to the floor in front of the judge's desk.

Up to this point Cæsar, awed by the stern manner of the judge, and, trusting to the superior intelligence and experience of his older sister, had been a silent although deeply moved spectator of the scene. But when Nadine collapsed, he sprang forward, and spoke out in clear brave tones.

“ Mr. Magistrate, it is no use your torturing my sister like that. You cannot by so doing compel her to lie. She never deceived anybody in her life. What she has told you, sir, is perfectly true, every word of it. The money that you accuse her of stealing was given her by

Madame Pradère, the lady of the Mayor of the town of Morainville."

"Madame Pradère!" exclaimed the magistrate, jumping up from his chair. "Did you say Madame Pradère?"

"Yes, sir," responded Cæsar. "Madame Pradère who lives in a fine mansion at Morainville."

"Pradère! Pradère!" repeated the magistrate. "I know him, he was lieutenant in the regiment when I retired. We were very good friends, Pradère and I, and we soon shall find out if you are speaking the truth. I shall write immediately to Morainville and institute inquiries into your affair."

"Then we are saved!" cried Cæsar, throwing out his arms in a gesture of relief and joy.

This exclamation was uttered in a tone of such manifest sincerity that the magistrate, who was not really as hard-hearted as he seemed, and who had been severe towards the Tambys because it is the custom in French courts to assume that every person brought them is a criminal, and to compel them to clear themselves, instead of considering them innocent until they were proven guilty, was profoundly impressed. He began to fear that he had been guilty of injustice and undue harshness.

“After all,” he reflected somewhat uneasily, “the story told by these children is very touching, and why may it not be true? I know that as a rule these mountebanks are not by any means good characters, but perhaps these orphans are an exception. I must deal more gently with them.” So, with a much less severe expression, and softer tone, he said to them, Nadine by this time having recovered her self-possession :

“My children, to-morrow we shall clear up your affairs. I shall write to Morainville requesting an immediate answer, and, if you have told the truth, you shall be free. But I am obliged to recommit you to prison until to-morrow. I shall see, however, that you are well cared for.”

“Oh, sir, it doesn’t matter so much about us,” spoke up Nadine. “We can manage to do without food for a day. We have already done so before, but our animals——”

“Ah! yes, to be sure,” responded the magistrate. “You have a horse, which has been put in a stable. You need not worry about him. He will get all he needs.”

“But Nalla—what about him?” persisted Nadine, seeming much concerned.

“Nalla!” exclaimed the magistrate rather testily, for he was anxious to be through with

the children for the present. "Who is it that you call Nalla?"

"Nalla," interposed the brigadier, "is a very big and dangerous beast, an elephant, which has insisted upon following us, and which at this moment is out there before your door."

The magistrate went to the window and drew aside the curtains. There was Nalla, silent and motionless, surrounded by a curious crowd that took care not to come too near him.

"Oh! ho!" he exclaimed. "What a huge creature? Is he indeed dangerous?"

"He?" replied Nadine, smiling at the idea. "He dangerous? Not a bit of it! He is as kind as possible, and I will guarantee that he does nobody any harm. But as he will not consent to part from us, won't you please permit him to remain at the prison gate until we come out again?"

"Very well, then, if you assure me that he will not do any mischief, I will consent to what you ask," said the magistrate graciously, "and to ease your minds, I may tell you that I will at once give orders that a thorough search of the neighborhood be made for any signs of your sister."

Nadine, her heart somewhat lightened by the promise, thanked the old man, and then the

three children were escorted by the gendarmes to the prison.

Here they were confined in a large cell, a bare, comfortless chamber that was all the more objectionable to them because of their being accustomed to such a free open-air life. The only source of cheer that they had was the promise of the sous-préfet to write to M. Pradère about them. But, presently, even this began to cause them uneasiness.

“What if Madame Pradère should be away from home?” said Nadine with a sigh of apprehension.

“Oh, don’t you remember that the kind old gendarme said that she hardly ever went away?” responded Cæsar, cheeringly.

“My dear brother,” returned Nadine, “you are doing your best to keep up my spirits, but you see I am not of so hopeful a nature as you are. It’s not my fault, Cæsar, indeed it isn’t, but I am troubled with dark presentiments. I am weighed down with anxiety that I cannot overcome. It is no doubt due to what has happened during the last two days, for I am greatly upset by it.”

Abel joined with Cæsar in well-meant efforts at consolation, and, as during the night before, the children had had no sleep at all, they now

began to doze off, and presently all three of them were sound asleep.

But poor Nadine's rest was disturbed by unpleasant dreams, and about midnight she awoke with a shriek of terror.

Cæsar at once woke up and sought to find her hand in the darkness that enshrouded them.

"What is the matter, dear sister?" he asked anxiously. "Are you in pain? Answer me, Nadine, I beg of you."

But Nadine made no reply, and when Cæsar took her hand he found that it was cold as ice. The sorely-tried girl had in fact fallen into a deep swoon.

Cæsar was terrified. Nadine was silent and motionless. Could she be dead? and there they were, shut up in the prison, without any way of getting assistance!

He set up a frantic shouting. He hammered on the massive door with all his might only to get back the dreary echoes of his blows. There was nobody near at that time to hear him. Everybody in Beaulieu was sound asleep.

There was one creature, however, that was awake, and whose keen ears caught the cries Cæsar uttered in his frantic concern. Nalla, keeping patient faithful watch beside the prison-

gate, heard his young master, and realizing that he was in trouble at once started trumpeting with all his might.

The appalling sound soon wakened the whole neighborhood, and the startled folk appeared at the windows and doors of their houses, but not one of them ventured to approach the huge animal from which it was proceeding.

On seeing that no one responded to his call Nalla tried to break down the gate of the prison in order to reach his young owners, and set them at liberty. But the gate was too strong. It successfully resisted his assault upon it. Then the wise old creature showed his remarkable intelligence.

He turned from the gate to the railing and with one stroke of his mighty trunk laid low the light iron bars. The way being thus cleared he went out alone into the deserted streets of the town.

Where now was he going with rapid step, and uplifted trunk as though ready to act in his own defense? Certainly he did not need any one to show him the way. He evidently knew just what he was about.

On he went, not in the least bothered by the darkness of the night, until he reached the house

to which he had accompanied the children that morning—that is to say, the residence of the magistrate.

Then he came to a halt, and, without any concern for the peaceful slumbers of the honest townsfolk of that quarter, he proceeded to renew his vigorous trumpeting !

The magistrate woke up, and hurried to the window to see what was the matter.

“ The elephant which was left shut up in the prison yard ! ” he exclaimed. “ How on earth did he get here ? He’ll arouse the whole town. Go away, you brute, and be quiet ! ”

And he closed the window intending to return to bed.

But Nalla had no thought of letting him alone. He repeated his sonorous appeal.

Of course under the circumstances sleep was out of the question for the magistrate. Moreover, the whole neighborhood was stirring, although it was not more than two o’clock of the morning.

Although very angry at first, on second thoughts the old gentleman, so rudely disturbed, began to say to himself :

“ After all there may be something amiss, or why has that big brute come here ? It can only

be to seek me out, and obtain my assistance? I must investigate at once."

So with a certain amount of grumbling he dressed himself, and went down, opening the front door very carefully.

As soon as Nalla saw him he ceased trumpeting, waved his trunk in joyful greeting, and, wheeling around, set off for the prison, the magistrate following meekly in his rear, and marveling at the sagacity displayed by this remarkable creature.

On their arrival they found the gendarmes gathered before the door, having been summoned by the startled neighbors. "Open the door immediately," commanded the magistrate.

The brigadier, who carried a lantern, unlocked the door, and led the way into the prison, while the other gendarmes remained outside, preserving a respectful distance from Nalla, who stood as close as possible to the door, listening intently for every sound.

CHAPTER XVI.

NADINE'S ILLNESS.

ON their entering the cell in which the Tambys were confined they found Nadine lying upon the floor, as pale and still as though she were dead.

The magistrate was greatly alarmed.

"The poor child has died!" he exclaimed, taking hold of her cold hand. "Brigadier, send one of your men off for a doctor immediately," and when the gendarme had hurried out he lifted Nadine's hand tenderly.

"She's not dead! She is breathing!" cried the magistrate suddenly, in a tone of relief and joy. And he proceeded to stroke her blanched cheeks and forehead with his hands in a gentle way that seemed surprising in such a stern old man.

Presently the doctor arrived all out of breath, for the brigadier had made him come as fast as possible. After a careful examination of Nadine he shook his head in a manner that was far from reassuring.

"Your Honor," he said, "the child must be at

once removed to the hospital. Her unconsciousness may continue for some hours longer, and when she does revive it will be absolutely necessary that she should be guarded against the slightest excitement. I shall go to the hospital at once and arrange for her reception."

Half an hour later Nadine was lying in a bed in the hospital, and at her side were Cæsar and Abel, in accordance with the directions of the magistrate.

"It is best that the young girl should first see her brothers when she comes to herself," said the thoughtful old man, and although the brigadier ventured to protest, he had of course to obey the orders of his superior.

Not until morning did the doctor, who had not left Nadine for a moment, give his opinion as to the nature of her illness.

"She undoubtedly has an attack of brain fever," he said, looking very grave, "and will require great care. You must give her every attention," he added, turning to the Sister of Charity, in whose charge Nadine would now be.

The Sister's heart was already full of sympathy for the sweet young girl, and she replied in her soft voice :

“Be assured, sir, she shall want for nothing. Everything possible will be done for her.”

Despite the authority given by the magistrate, that Cæsar and Abel should be permitted to remain near their sister, it must not be supposed that they were set at liberty. They were still kept under surveillance, although indeed there was small need for it. But the brigadier persisted in believing in those two hundred francs to have been stolen.

During the long anxious days while Nadine's life hung in the balance, poor Cæsar did not concern himself as to whether there had been any answer received from Morainville, until one morning the doctor announced that, barring fresh complications which he could not then foresee, Nadine would recover.

The two boys fairly shouted for joy at this good news, and, his mind being thus relieved about his sister, Cæsar was able to think of something else.

Naturally his first thought was about the Pradères, and he begged the brigadier, who came to the hospital every day to make sure that his youthful prisoners had not escaped, to take him to the magistrate in order to find out what answer had been received.

The brigadier at first evaded the request, by pretending not to hear what Cæsar said. But the boy reiterated his request, and the brigadier had to reply.

“I must tell you, then,” he said, “that your Madame Pradère has made no reply, and this goes to confirm my suspicions.”

“What!” cried Cæsar, incredulously. “No reply? You say that Madame Pradère has not answered! But that is impossible! She knows perfectly well that we didn’t steal the money.”

And, refusing to credit it, he was so importunate that at last for very peace’ sake the brigadier took him to the magistrate.

“Is it true, sir!” he asked, with anxious, apprehensive face and tone, “that Madame Pradère has not answered the letter you wrote to her more than a month ago?”

“Yes, my boy, it is true,” responded the magistrate kindly. “But just to-day came the explanation of her silence. She has suffered a great calamity. On the very day the gendarmes put you in prison at Beaulieu, Monsieur Pradère was killed by a fiery horse that he was training.”

“M. Pradère killed!” murmured Cæsar sadly. “Oh! how sorry I am, and Nadine will be so sorry too. They were such good friends to us!”

"You can easily understand," continued the magistrate, "that under such circumstances the poor lady would not be giving attention to her correspondence. But here now is the brief communication that she has made to me :

"DEAR SIR :

It is quite true that I gave the Tamby children the envelope containing the two hundred francs. They are thoroughly honest and very intelligent children, and I commend them to your kind consideration. V. PRADERE."

"Surely now we are free!" cried Cæsar so soon as the magistrate had finished reading the note.

"Yes, my child, you are free," was the kindly response. "But it will be necessary for you to remain here for some time yet, because your sister is not even convalescent, and her recovery may take a long time."

"That is so, sir," Cæsar returned. "But Abel and I will try to get work in the neighborhood so that we may provide for ourselves and our animals, and not be beholden to any one."

"You are a brave manly boy!" said the magistrate, clapping him upon the shoulders, "and I will interest myself in obtaining employment for you. I will guarantee your good character."

Thus matters went on until the middle of November. By that time, although she had not by any means regained her full strength, Nadine was so determined to have her own way that the doctor, having given her a thousand injunctions to be very careful of herself, permitted her to return to the van.

The three Tambys were then very happy at being reunited, and in cherishing the hope that ere long they would have their sister restored to them.

Alas, the poor young things had not yet drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of trial that had been thrust upon them, for now Nalla began to be a source of anxiety. He spent much of the time lying down and refused to do his work. For long periods he would remain motionless, taking no interest in anything except the voices of passing children, at which sound he would suddenly raise his head, and would follow the children as far as he could with his small bright eyes, while he uttered groans like those he was wont to give forth when playing with little Lydia.

Nadine and Cæsar had no difficulty in deciding what was the matter with him. He was mourning for his beloved little playmate who had so strangely disappeared.

For days he would not take a bit of food—although he was usually a great eater—and this in itself was enough to give them keen concern. Yet nothing that they could do to comfort him had any effect. Evidently they must simply wait for his grief to wear away unless they could succeed in finding Lydia in the meantime.

At every place they visited their first proceeding was to make inquiry as to whether any strolling performers had passed that way, and when they were answered in the affirmative they would ask if it was noticed whether they had with them a little girl six years of age and having brown hair and eyes.

But nothing came of all their eager inquiries. Lydia seemed to have vanished utterly.

Meanwhile the days went by, and the middle of December found them still searching vainly for their lost sister. The weather, which had hitherto been unusually mild, might at any time become cruelly cold.

It was with serious concern that the poor children regarded the advent of the season which is so hard upon the poor, and among the poor there are surely none who feel it more than the wandering folk who live in vans. Not only have they to face the bitter cold as they travel from one place

to another, but the van, which is their dwelling, while well enough on the fine warm days of summer, is but a poor apology for a comfortable home when the winter winds blow fiercely.

What is even still more serious for these wandering artists, their patrons naturally prefer remaining snugly at their own firesides with their feet toasting at the ruddy flames to standing in the open air watching a performance while the cold is nipping them.

The Tamby receipts were very scanty, and they suffered all the more on that account, because they had first to consider Steady and Nalla and make sure that they were well fed, even though Nalla's appetite was not what it used to be. They had accordingly to buy a great deal of hay, and hay was expensive. Nadine had always endeavored so far as she was able to give the big creature the things he liked, and often he would caress her with his trunk in token of his appreciation of her attentions, but there were no more dainties for him now, nothing but the plainest of fare.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN A DESPERATE STRAIT.

THE Tambys were now in the department of Gironde, and on the twentieth of December, about eleven in the morning, they left Parentes in order to go to Mamezan, a town situated on the sea-side. They had to traverse about twenty miles of open moor and of pine woods without a single house on the whole route, and at that time of the year the night came on early.

When they were starting, Nalla, who was lying down beside the van, seemed very reluctant to rise, and did so only in obedience to Nadine, who said :

“ My friend, be brave. We must go on farther and farther until we have found Lydia. Then we shall be able to take a good long rest. Come now, get up, like a good fellow. We have to be off without delay.”

And so with manifest reluctance the elephant slowly rose, and followed mopingly along in the rear of the van that Steady seemed to find in-

creasing difficulty in dragging over the hard roads.

The little party made slow progress, and at the end of three hours had accomplished only one-half of the journey.

Furthermore, a violent and icy wind blowing in from the sea raised the sand in a way that blinded poor old Steady, who toiled along painfully with his head bent as low as if he would fain bury it between his legs, and, finally, it was necessary to halt from time to time in order to let Nalla rest, for he seemed too feeble to walk at all fast.

The sky became covered with dark heavy clouds, and the temperature suddenly went down, while the bitter wind continued to blow mercilessly. Then the snow began to fall.

The great stretch of sand was utterly deserted save for the solitary van with its occupants and Nalla, and in a few minutes the whole plain was as white as a tablecloth. The snow fell so thickly as to completely shut out the sky and all the world around.

Cæsar, anxious for the animals, managed to arrange the canvas curtain of their "theater" so that it covered Nalla's head and the most of Steady's body, and then the three children shut

themselves up in the van with Vigilant to endure the misery of their situation as best they could.

Poor old Steady kept up a dolorous whinnying and stamping of his hoofs as he strove to kick away the snow which banked about his feet, and chilled his legs, while Nalla poured forth pitiful plaints that sounded remarkably like sobs as he cowered beneath the canvas, which was all too small to afford him anything like adequate shelter.

For more than an hour the storm raged, the snow falling so heavily that Steady was buried in it up to his knees, and the van up to the hubs of the wheels.

After it ceased to fall the sky continued to be dark and lowering, and to give promise of further avalanches, and beneath the somber heavens the immense plain spread out as far as eye could reach, one vast expanse of blinding whiteness.

Oh ! the white robe of cruel winter, which is in truth the mourning of Nature, and of the unfortunate creatures that have no snug shelter ! How saddening it is ! How it chills the heart ! It is so dreadful to think of poor wretches who have no warm hearth to sit beside, no roof to cover them, but must suffer the pangs that the merciless cold alone can inflict, and perhaps lie

down to die with the un pitying snow as their winding-sheet !

The Tamby children, unfortunate though they certainly were, had at least the protection of their van, and might have been comfortable after a fashion had not their hearts been wrung with anxiety for their missing sister, who, for aught they knew, was exposed to the same storm, and for their faithful beasts cowering close to the van that afforded them but partial shelter from the cutting blast.

“Poor Nalla and Steady !” said Cæsar, as he closed the door, after being out to speak encouragingly to them, and to pat their heads. “If they were only no bigger than Vigilant they could come into the van with us, and we would help to keep each other warm.”

“It is indeed too bad they have to be out in all this storm,” murmured Nadine, her eyes filling with tears, “and I’m very much afraid it may make Nalla sick. He seems a good deal out of sorts already. Oh, Cæsar, what would we do if he were to die ! We could never earn a living without him !”

Cæsar put his arm around his sister, and stroked her hair tenderly.

“Of course we could, dearie,” he said with a

cheery confidence, much more emphatic than he really felt. "We would not of course do quite so well at first without the dear old fellow, who is now the chief attraction of our entertainment, but we would put something else in his place. You might learn some new songs, and I some new tricks, and Abel might do an act with Vigilant, and so on."

Nadine brightened up at his encouraging words.

"That's the way to look at it," she responded. "How brave you are, my brother!" Then with a sigh that seemed to rend her heart, "But, oh!—if we only had our little Lydia back!"

The storm subsided. The snowflakes grew lighter and fewer, and the atmosphere clearer, but the Tambys realized with much concern that the light was waning as at the approach of night. It was only three o'clock in the afternoon, but on the twentieth of December darkness comes early. Yet they were still nearly ten miles from the town of Mamezan, which was their destination.

"Cæsar," exclaimed Nadine, rousing herself from the sad reverie into which she had relapsed, "we must start again at once, or we shall have to spend the night out in this desolate plain."

"We must, indeed," answered Cæsar with a brisk toss of the head, "but it will be precious

slow going. See, Nadine, how deep the snow is ! Steady is right up to his knees in it. I must get him out."

So saying, he pulled away the canvas which had been covering the horse and elephant, and taking the former by the bridle, called out in the same tone as if he were speaking to a human companion :

"Brace up, comrade ! It will be a hard job for you to drag the heavy van through this deep snow, but we must be off if we don't want to spend the night without shelter. So come along, do your best, old chap !"

Steady was quite willing to show that he did not lack good-will. He strained hard upon the collar, and by dint of a succession of vigorous efforts, succeeded in getting the van in motion.

But after a few turns of the wheels it stopped again. The load was beyond his strength, and the poor creature in his noble efforts to start it, slipped upon the already hard frozen snow, and fell heavily, injuring his knees.

Cæsar and Nadine burst into despairing tears, in which little Abel joined. But it was only for a moment.

"This won't do," cried the brave-hearted boy, springing up and dashing away the tears as if

he were ashamed of them. "I know what I'll try."

He remembered what he had seen his father do sometimes when the road had been too soft, or the hills too steep upon their route, and he at once proceeded to imitate it.

He led Nalla out in front of the van, and attached him by ropes to the whippetree. Then, in as cheery a tone as he could manage, he called out :

"Now, then, Nalla, help your old comrade out of his difficulty. You see he cannot haul the van through this deep snow alone. You must give him the aid of your vast strength."

But alas ! Nalla seemed to have lost all his his strength and spirit. Instead of responding to such an appeal as the faithful, big-hearted creature was wont to do, he collapsed upon the snow !

With this, all hope of the poor children being able to get away appeared to be at an end. There was no other alternative than to spend the night on that appalling waste of snow.

Of course they would be fairly well sheltered from the cold in their van, and, as they fortunately had a little fuel still left, they could keep up a small fire in the tiny cooking-stove.

But how about the elephant and the horse?

What was to become of them ? Something must be done on their behalf. So Cæsar, Nadine and Abel went to work to clear away the snow from around the van, in order to make some sort of a resting-place for the two animals.

It was hard work, although they went at it with all their strength, and by the time it was finished night was drawing near.

"Here now, Nalla," said Cæsar. "Get up, old fellow, from that cold place, and come over to where we have cleared all the snow away. You will find it much more comfortable."

The big creature, after several vain efforts, succeeded in getting to his feet again, and followed Cæsar to the spot indicated, where he at once lay down again.

Nadine was very much alarmed.

"Cæsar !" she cried, "this is something serious. I have often seen Nalla tired out, and sometimes sick, but never so bad as this. He no doubt needs a warm mash to revive him, and I haven't a thing out of which to make it."

Cæsar formed a resolution with his wonted promptness.

"Nadine," he said, "I'll go right away to Mamezan for the help we need. It is now four o'clock. I'll be back before midnight."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RECOVERY OF NALLA.

“YOU'RE a brave boy, Cæsar!” cried Nadine, her face glowing with love and pride. “But do you realize what that would mean? You could hardly make a mile an hour through this deep snow. It is above your knees, and you would soon become exhausted by wading through it. No—no—dear brother—it would be folly to try it, and, moreover, you cannot do it any way.”

“Why so?” persisted Cæsar, who was thoroughly in earnest. “I'm sure I can do it. Just remember that Nalla's life is in danger. If nothing is done for him soon he will surely die.”

Half-convinced, Nadine looked out upon the white wilderness, as bare, as silent, as trackless as the ocean. North, south, east, and west not a sign of human habitation could be discerned. The three young occupants of the shabby old van might have been the only people in the world. Turning sadly to Cæsar, she said with a sigh that was more like a sob :

“In which direction will you go, Cæsar?”

Cæsar gazed earnestly in every direction, asking of the horizon the question his sister had put to him, but there was no answer forthcoming from the encircling gloom. He had overlooked the fact that the snow had obliterated the roads, and that consequently he would be unable to find his way. In a despondent tone he replied :

“I won’t go at all, Nadine. I don’t know where Mamezan lies. We’ll have to stay here for the night, and make the best of it.”

The big canvas was accordingly used to cover poor old Nalla, who lay groaning dolefully, and Steady having been tied close to the van so as to get all the shelter it could afford, the Tambys went to bed supperless.

Not a star shone in the sky, nor friendly light glimmered in the distance. The children were alone—utterly alone, on the great plain of which the snow had made a white lifeless desert.

They threw themselves upon their beds without undressing, and Abel, poor little chap, did not take long to go to sleep, but Cæsar and Nadine could not thus forget for a time their troubles. Again and again did one or other of them get up to go to Nalla, who moaned piteously, and at last, about four o’clock, they became greatly alarmed

by the heartrending cries of the animal, who appeared to be in great suffering, and unable to lift his head from where it lay upon the frozen ground.

The two children, filled with the keenest concern, and yet powerless to do anything, remained by the head of their faithful friend, and at break of day were joined by Abel, who had awakened from his sleep.

When Nalla lay down he instinctively turned his head to the quarter in which the sun would rise, as if he would see for the last time, may be, the dawn which had always been a favorite sight with him. And now his eyes, almost closed, watched the first faint gray lights of a chill winter's morning.

Perhaps he then had a vision of the far-away jungle in which he was born, and where he spent his youth. Perhaps this plain, stripped of its winding-sheet of snow, that stretched before his eyes, recalled to his memory those other plains of far greater extent, which he had traversed in his own country. Perhaps he saw, as in a mirage, the dense thickets of luxurious vegetation in which he had taken refuge with his own kind, and the savage grandeur of the mysterious regions wherein his early years had been spent.

May be Nalla in this supreme hour reviewed the different stages of his life, from the day when, while still a mere calf, he was captured by tamed elephants trained to make prisoners of wild ones, until when in his fiftieth year he became the protector and breadwinner of the Tamby family.

Lydia had been his particular pet. He loved her with the whole strength of his big heart, and her sudden disappearance had been a rude shock to his already failing health. The tender-hearted creature mourned for his darling and could not be comforted.

By eight o'clock it was broad daylight. But such a day ! The sky hung low and threatening. The heavy clouds were of a sullen gray color. The snow seemed ready to resume falling in greater quantity. Nadine, Cæsar, and Abel did not leave the side of their big friend. Nadine tenderly patted the limp trunk, while she said, soothingly :

"Don't lose heart, Nalla ! It is day again, and Cæsar will go to the town to get assistance for you. We will save you, Nalla. You often saved us in critical times, and we are not going to let you die. You are our best friend. You are not only our chief resource in the gaining of our daily bread, but you are, above all, our

old and tried comrade, truest and most devoted friend. You are, moreover, our best hope for the recovery of Lydia—our dear little Lydia, my good Nalla, the little Lydia of whom you are so fond. You will live, won't you, Nalla, to love us, and be loved by us in return ?”

Nalla remained motionless through all Nadine's tender appeals, yet he seemed to understand every word she uttered. His sorrowful little eyes were turned towards the children to tell them that he understood, and that he was extremely sorry to cause them so much anxiety.

Presently his huge body began to shake with violent tremors. It was plain that severe pangs tortured him, and he presented a pitiable spectacle as he lay there upon the wild waste of snow, to all appearances beyond the reach of assistance.

He could breathe now only with great difficulty, and he made pathetic efforts to raise his head in order to obtain the air he needed. At last the poor creature gathered strength to lift his trunk, and pass it around the three children, who were sitting beside him, thus drawing them one by one nearer to himself. There he held them for some minutes as though seeking to have them realize how much he was suffering, and how deeply he was attached to them. Poor Nalla ! he

whose cradle bed had been the warm sod of the land of sunshine, now had for sick-bed a snow-drift !

Suddenly Cæsar sprang to his feet.

“ Nadine ! ” he said, “ I believe that the cold is making Nalla worse, and that he is likely to die here. Can’t we do something to get him warm ? ”

“ Yes—yes, ” replied Nadine. “ We must try and make him warm. But how shall we do it ? ”

“ Nadine, it must be done at any cost, ” returned Cæsar. “ First of all let us clear away all the snow from about him. ”

So once more the three children set courageously to work at sweeping the snow away. When this had been accomplished Cæsar said briskly :

“ Now, then, let us make a fire. ”

“ What shall we make it with ? ” asked Nadine, looking around as if in hopes of seeing a pile of wood somewhere.

“ With anything—everything, ” responded Cæsar in a determined tone. “ With our van if there is nothing else that will do. ”

At the suggestion of this extreme measure Nadine paled, and for a moment showed hesitation. But it was only for a moment.

“ Yes, Cæsar, ” she cried, “ we’ll do it. We’ll

make firewood of the van before we'll let Nalla die !”

“ But we won't begin on the van until we have used up everything else,” returned Cæsar.

Without delay they went to work upon their fire. The trestles, the planks, and everything else that composed their “theater,” their chairs and tables and other articles of furniture, they were all sacrificed without demur, and the bon-fire presently assumed considerable proportions, crackling and roaring cheerfully.

In its flames Nadine melted snow in a metal basin, and made Nalla drink the warm water, replenishing the basin again and again until he had absorbed several gallons of it.

After a little, to their infinite joy the big fellow began to show signs of improvement. He trumpeted in a feeble way, and moved his trunk about. His piteous groanings ceased altogether. Manifestly he was on the mend.

“ Bravo, Nadine !” exclaimed Cæsar, smiling radiantly at these cheering signs. “ You always know just the right thing to do. That hot water is making Nalla well again. What a clever girl you are !”

Nadine was so ruddy from her exertions and the heat of the blaze at which she was working

that the blush of pleasure her brother's praise evoked only added a deeper tinge as she made haste to reply.

“But it was you that thought of the fire, Cæsar, and if it were not for it there would be no hot water, you know,” and she patted him lovingly on the shoulder.

At the end of half-an-hour Nalla got his head up, and not long after rose to his feet, although he was still very shaky on his great legs. But he held his trunk high once more, and looked at his young owners with a new brightness in his eyes. The danger which threatened his life had passed, and Nalla was undoubtedly saved!

The children were almost delirious with joy. They hugged in turn the elephant's trunk. They embraced one another. They danced around their big friend singing gleefully until they were completely tired out, and then they went back to their beds to try and get some sleep before the return of day.



AT THE END OF HALF AN HOUR NALLA GOT HIS HEAD UP.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

SNOW ! snow ! snow ! in flakes and flurries it fell from the skies to the earth as though there were no end to it. Not until ten o'clock of the following morning did the soft avalanche cease, and by that time so much had fallen that Abel was lifted on to the roof of the van to sweep away the snowy coverlet which had become threatening through its weight, while Cæsar shook off the snow that seemed to be trying to hide the canvas which sheltered Steady.

He gave the old horse the remainder of the hay, and went back inside the van to consult with Nadine as to what had best be done. Nalla appeared to be still suffering, but able to stand upon his great legs.

The three children stood at the door of the van and gazed eagerly over the wide white plain, and then up at the sky. The latter looked decidedly unpromising. There was no hint of a change for the better in the weather.

“Well, we certainly can’t stay here!” exclaimed Cæsar in a tone of decision. “We must find some way of getting out of this fix, or we shall all die.”

“But how, my dear brother?” asked Nadine despondently.

“I’ll do what I said at first,” responded Cæsar. “I’ll set out alone for Mamezan. I’ll then hire a man and a horse to help us and I’ll procure some food.”

“It seems the only thing to do” said Nadine with an anxious sigh. “You’d better go, dear, but oh! be very careful!”

They had their breakfast, and Nadine after an examination of their larder, announced that there was sufficient food left to do Abel and her until night if Cæsar did not get back sooner. So tying a big handkerchief over his hat that it might protect his face as much as possible, buttoning up his coat tightly, and taking a short stick, he embraced Nadine and Abel, and was ready to start.

But in which direction was he to go? They all three scanned the trackless plain to try and discern some sign of a road. It was as white, as smooth, as virgin as if no foot of man or beast ever crossed it.

Then to Nadine's bright brain came a wise thought.

"When we left Parentes was not Mamezan in the west where the sun sets, Cæsar?"

"Yes—it was," responded Cæsar, "but there's no sun to be seen now, so we can't tell anything by that."

"True enough," returned Nadine, her pretty face bright with intelligence; "but you know that Nalla every morning turns his head to the rising sun. Last night our old friend as usual wanted to be ready to see the dawn of the day, and he turned towards the east. You should therefore go in the opposite direction in which to find Mamezan."

Cæsar's countenance lost its puzzled look, and was brightened by a smile of comprehension.

"You clever girl!" he cried. "You are right, of course, as you always are. I never saw the like of you for thinking of things. And Nalla, dear old Nalla, has come to our help again. Oh, what a treasure he is!"

With his mind thus settled Cæsar once more bade the others good-bye, and started off, trudging manfully through the deep snow which made the walking hard work for his young legs.

"Good-bye, my brother!" Nadine called after

him. "A safe journey to Mamezan, and a quick return to deliver us from this dreadful place."

Fighting his way through the deep snow which made every step a task of difficulty Cæsar plodded due west, making frequent halts to get his breath, and to glance back at the van, which stood out so prominently, the only dark spot in that wilderness of white.

He had not gone very far before he found that Vigilant was following him, although he had not invited him to do so.

"You good dog!" he cried, well pleased at having such a companion, and stooping down to pat him vigorously. "You're not afraid to accompany your master instead of staying snugly in the van. I'm so glad to have you with me."

When Cæsar spoke thus he little guessed what a fortunate thing the dog's devotion was to prove.

Vigilant responded with a volley of barks that confirmed his intention to stick to his master, but had also a plaintive tone as though he would imply that, for himself, he would have deemed it much wiser to remain in the shelter of the van.

When they had been walking for about two hours Vigilant lay down and held up his paws in

a significant way, at the same time barking piteously.

“Why, what is the matter, Vigilant?” asked Cæsar with concern. “Are your feet hurting you?”

As the animal continued his appeals Cæsar picked him up, and examined his paws. The poor little things were extremely sore from contact with the hard frozen snow and not fit to be walked upon.

“Heigh-ho!” exclaimed Cæsar. “There’s nothing for it but to carry you,” and gathering the dog in his arms he renewed his toilsome tramp thus burdened.

But he was suffering in no small measure himself. The cruel cold attacked his face, his hands and his feet mercilessly, and to make matters worse, his boots, which were in sore need of repairs, failed to keep out the snow with which they were now filled. Every step was pain. But he struggled on heroically, carrying the heavy dog.

About three in the afternoon his eyes were gladdened by the sight of a column of smoke rising to the sky a long way off.

“Bravo!” he cried, “I’m in the right direction. I will reach a house soon,” and encouraged by

this prospect, he pushed ahead with renewed vigor, although his strength was fast failing, and the walking grew no easier.

That smoke meant Mamezan without doubt, and Mamezan meant relief for them all. He must get there before night.

For another half-hour he plowed laboriously through the drifts, and by the end of that time the roofs of Mamezan hove into sight through the fading light of the day already drawing to a close.

But alas ! with the haven getting so near he began to feel that he should not be able to reach it. His whole system was on the verge of complete collapse. Agonizing pains shot through his body like stabs from red-hot needles. Then a roaring filled his ears. He became blind and dizzy, and, at last, succumbing to his sufferings, he fell unconscious upon the snow !

Vigilant, standing by his master, howled dismally. His paws having got warm while Cæsar carried him in his arms, he was able to use them again, and he ran hither and thither barking frantically, while Cæsar with pallid hands and face lay motionless.

Seeing that his young master made no response to his appeals Vigilant lifted his head, and looked

about him in every direction. Then, after a moment's pause he set off at full speed in the direction of Mamezan.

It was now night—a cold dark December night. Vigilant kept on at a good pace until suddenly he stopped, and turned about. He heard the sound of a bell, and saw a good way off the gleam of a light that was not still, but was moving towards him, while the tinkling of the bell grew clearer.

With a joyous bark that meant as plainly as words :

“ Hurrah ! there's some one who will help us,” Vigilant scampered over the snow in the direction of the light.

It was borne by the rider of an old and tired horse, and this rider was the old curé of Mamezan, Père Blandinière, who was returning to the town after having dispensed extreme unction to a dying member of his congregation. From time to time he chirruped to his steed, which seemed almost exhausted.

The good man was greatly surprised at the sudden appearance of Vigilant, whose sharp barks demanded prompt attention, and he turned the rays of the lantern upon the faithful creature.

“ Why, bless me ! ” he exclaimed, bringing his

horse to a halt, which was only too easily done. "What's the meaning of a dog like this being away out here alone at such an hour of the night?"

For he saw at once that it was no common farmer's dog, but a poodle of high breeding that was barking so insistently at his horse's feet.

So soon as Vigilant saw that he had attracted the curé's attention he sat up on his hind legs, and begged for help in a way that could not be misunderstood.

Then, dropping on all fours, he darted off in the direction where Cæsar was, and as quickly returned to resume his entreaties. The wise old man at once grasped the situation.

"I understand you, you clever animal!" he said in a tone of great kindness. "Your master has succumbed to the cold, and you want me to help him. Lead me to him then, I will follow at once, and the good God grant I may be in time!"

Vigilant, the moment he saw his meaning was understood, gave a volley of joyous barks, and rushed off towards where he had left Cæsar, coming back every few yards to make sure that the curé was following, for in his impatience he went much faster than the wearied old horse.

A little later the curé was bending over the motionless form of Cæsar.

“Poor boy !” he murmured with deep sympathy. “He still breathes, but he would assuredly have died but for this wonderfully intelligent animal.”

He at once set to work chafing Cæsar’s hands and cheeks, and, presently, wrapping him in his own cloak, lifted him up on to the saddle, holding him there while he himself walked beside the horse, then, followed by Vigilant, who marched along with head and tail erect in proud satisfaction at having brought rescue to his beloved master, they in due time reached the presbytery.

The curé had the still unconscious boy put into a warm bed, where before long he recovered his senses, and opened his eyes.

He looked about the bright cosy room with wondering inquiry, and caught the eye of the kind priest, who was sitting near him conning his breviary and repeating the familiar words to himself as the movement of his lips showed.

“Ah ! ha !” exclaimed Père Blandinière in a tone of satisfaction as he rose from his seat, and approached the bed. “You have come back to life, eh ? I felt sure you would. You are too sturdy a lad to let the cold put an end like that to you. And how are you feeling now ?”

Cæsar felt so languid, and at the same time so entirely comfortable in the soft warm bed that his inclination was to lie still and say nothing. But he was too courteous a boy to do that, and, moreover, as soon as his senses returned, he began to think about the others, Nadine and Abel, who were so anxiously awaiting his return.

Instinctively he tried to get up, but the curé gently pressed him back into the bed.

"No—no—my son," he said, kindly yet firmly. "Just stay where you are for the present. But if you feel strong enough pray tell me your story."

"But Nadine, and Abel, and Nalla," cried Cæsar. "They must be saved," and his big dark eyes glowed with intense earnestness as he clasped his hands like one in prayer.

"And they shall be saved, my son," responded the curé soothingly. "Never fear, they shall be saved. Tell me all about them."

Relieved by this assurance Cæsar, now fully master of himself, made haste to tell the story of the van and how it was lost in the wilderness of snow.

CHAPTER XX. .

IN CARE OF THE CURÉ.

THE good curé listened with sympathetic interest.

“Help shall be sent to them without delay,” he said. “Your clever dog will no doubt be able to guide those who shall go straight to the van, and now if you will drink this warm soup which my servant has just brought in, and then compose yourself to sleep, which you greatly need, you may count on finding your brother and sister here when you wake again.”

Cæsar obeyed without question. He had perfect faith in the benevolent priest. The welcome soup sent thrills of comfort through his whole frame, and as soon as he had drunk the last drop his head fell back upon the pillow, and he sank into a profound sleep.

Meanwhile the curé had organized a party of rescue. Late as the hour was he had no difficulty in getting willing responses to his appeals, and in a short time several men leading two strong

horses set out to find the van, Vigilant proudly acting as guide.

The sagacious animal took them straight to the spot, and at their coming, Nadine, whose nerves had been enduring so cruel a strain, burst into tears of joy, while Abel capered about shouting :

“ We’re saved ! We’re saved ! ” and then throwing himself upon Vigilant, rolled him over in the snow in the exuberance of his delight.

The horses were promptly attached to the van, replacing poor old tired-out Steady, who joined Nalla at the rear, and the little procession moved towards Mamezan at a good pace.

Father Blandinière with the aid of his warm-hearted housekeeper had everything ready at the presbytery for the reception of Nadine and Abel, and for the accommodation of their animals. They were all well fed, and then retired to rest, the children in comfortable beds, and the animals in a warm stable.

It was broad daylight when Cæsar awoke, and being of a strong constitution, he found himself little the worse for the exposure of the previous night. He lay there for a while enjoying the luxury of the soft bed, and then his desire to know about Nadine and Abel impelled him to get up.

He made his way down-stairs, and opening the door, was rejoiced to see the familiar old van in the yard with the faithful Nalla standing beside it, and seeming to be quite himself again.

“Yes—there’s your little house on wheels with everything belonging to it,” said a kind voice behind him, and Cæsar, turning around, saw the curé’s housekeeper smiling pleasantly upon him. “But you must not expect to see your sister and brother for a while yet. They are still sound asleep. They were quite worn out, the poor things !”

Cæsar thanked her warmly for her kindness to them, and went out to the stable to see how Steady was, stopping on the way to pat Nalla’s trunk, and to say affectionately :

“You dear monster ! I’m so glad you’re better. I hope you’ll not be ill like that again.”

Old Steady set up a joyous neighing as soon as he heard his young master’s footsteps. There was nothing the matter with him, and after making his little demonstration he resumed munching the excellent hay with which the manger was liberally supplied.

It was not until midday that Nadine and Abel awoke, and as the three children were exchanging embraces the housekeeper came to say that dinner

was ready, and that the curé invited them all to dine with him.

Wonderfully refreshed by their sound sleep, delighted at being together again in so comfortable an establishment, and with the keenest of appetites, the three children followed the housekeeper into the dining-room where they were graciously received by the benevolent curé.

M. Blandinière seated them at the table, and saw to it that they had thoroughly enjoyed the steaming savory soup before he asked them any questions.

Then he drew them out to talk about themselves, and to tell him their whole story, to which he listened with deep interest and sympathy. He had reached the age of seventy years, for two score of which he had been the curé of Mamezan, where he was universally beloved for his good deeds, and amiable qualities. He was the kind providence of the unfortunate, the confidant of the young, the most trusted friend of the old, the comforter of the sorrowing, the one whose presence was sought above all others by those drawing near the dread Valley of the Shadow.

When Nadine in her clear sweet way had finished her recital, the good man murmured as he placed his soft white hand gently upon her head :

“Poor little things! Poor little things! Orphans! Left alone in the world at the very time when most in need of counsel and protection!”

Then he was silent for a moment while the children fixed their eyes upon his wrinkled countenance that expressed benignity in every line. Presently he spoke :

“I am very poor, my dears, and am not able to do much for you, but however poor one may be it is their duty to share what they have with those who are still worse off. Your purpose is, you say, to continue your journey that you may recover your sister, and earn your living. That is right, I approve of your resolution, but you are worn out. You need a good rest before you can proceed, and I am going to keep you for a while. We will take good care of your elephant so that he may regain his health, and will look after your horse and dog. The Christmas festival is at hand. We will join you in praying to the good God that He will restore to you the little one for whom you mourn. I will allow you to give a performance at Mamezan before you leave—that is, after the Christmas fêtes. For the present you are my guests, and I want you to enjoy yourselves thoroughly.”

With brimming eyes and quivering lips, for the

kindness of the curé moved them deeply, Nadine and Cæsar tried to find words in which to express their gratitude, while Abel, inspired by one of the happy impulses of childhood, slipped down from his chair, and gliding to the curé's side, put up his face, whispering :

“Please may I kiss you, I love you.”

Bending over the little chap, Father Blandinière encircled him with his arm, and imprinted a kiss upon his plump cheek, murmuring to himself :

“Truly, of such is the Kingdom of Heaven !”

That afternoon, as the three children were strolling about the streets of Mamezan, and felicitating themselves upon the happy turn in their fortunes, Nadine stopped suddenly and said :

“But how can we repay the curé's kindness ? We are poor—poorer than ever before, and our future is very uncertain.”

“Nadine,” responded Cæsar, looking very wise, “I know something that will greatly please the curé. I have spoken to the sacristan, and he said it was a capital idea, and I promised him to carry it out.”

“And what did you promise ?” asked Nadine eagerly.

“Ah ! that is my secret, which I shall keep

carefully," responded Cæsar. "But I assure you that it will give the curé great pleasure."

After the evening meal, which they had at an early hour, they all went to bed to get a good sleep before midnight. In good time the housekeeper aroused them, and, having dressed carefully, they went to the village church, Nadine and Abel in company with the housekeeper, while Cæsar, so full of his secret that he could hardly trust himself to speak, joined the sacristan, who was evidently waiting for him.

They found the church already well filled for the celebration of the midnight mass. There were bronzed fishermen and bearded miners by the score, for it was a custom faithfully observed in that village that the men should never miss the Christmas Mass if they could possibly be present.

At the last stroke of midnight the priest, good Father Blandinière, took his place before the altar, and the solemn service began.

It must be admitted that at Mamezan they were not very exacting in regard to the singing of the chants. There was only the sacristan, who in a hard, rough voice led a handful of boys, who had very little notion either of time or tune. Indeed, it was quite a grief to the venerable priest

that he could not have better music at his church. But the people were too poor to pay for an organ and an organist, and so they had to be content with the well-meaning but far from harmonious sacristan.

The choir, if it may be so called, was placed in a little gallery over the main entrance, and into this gallery Cæsar followed the sacristan.

Nadine had wondered why he did not go with them to the church, and had been looking for him all over the building. At last she caught sight of him in the gallery, and gave a start of surprise.

“Why, what can Cæsar be doing there?” she said to herself. Just then the sacristan made a sign to him, and he advanced to the front of the gallery with his mandolin in hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RETURN TO MORAINVILLE.

As the first sweet notes fell from Cæsar's fingers, the congregation turned their heads to see what this novel music meant, and Nadine, catching Abel's arm, whispered :

"Now I know the secret. Cæsar is going to sing '*Minuit Chrétien*,' he knows it perfectly."

Then a great silence settled upon the worshippers. It seemed as if they hardly breathed in their eager expectancy.

M. Blandinière was taken completely by surprise. The secret had been well kept. But he felt it in his heart that all would be well, and, pausing before beginning the *Pater Noster*, he stood with his arms outstretched towards his people, and the tears dimming his eyes while Cæsar's clear sweet voice filled the church with the lovely music of the *Cantique de Noel*.

It was a beautiful and impressive scene. Thrilled with the purest emotions, Nadine stood as in a dream. But for one thing, she would have been in a very heaven of joy—if only little

Lydia stood beside her with Abel! Instinctively her heart was lifted to the good God that he would soon restore her darling sister to her.

When Cæsar finished there followed an interval of silence, and then the noble old priest, turning from the altar to the people, chanted in a voice trembling with tears, the *Pater Noster*.

For the first time in its history, the old church of Mamezan had heard the notes of a mandolin, and for the first time also, perhaps, had the simple villagers listened to so sweet and touching a rendering of the exquisite *Cantique de Noel*.

When the midnight Mass was ended the congregation returned to their homes, and for some time there echoed through the still, cold air of the night the clatter of their sabots upon the hard frozen ground.

The Tambys went back to the presbytery where Father Blandinière, taking Cæsar's hands in his, thanked him in these sincere, simple words :

"I thank you, my dear child, with all my heart. You have afforded me a great pleasure this night."

The Christmas celebration being over the children began preparations to leave Mamezan and the good curé who had proved so timely a benefactor. M. Blandinière had given them permis-

sion to give one performance before leaving the village. But they were very much concerned regarding it. Their program now seemed to be so sadly shortened with Lydia gone, and their "theater" destroyed. There remained just the amusing act of Steady and Vigilant, Cæsar's sleight-of-hand tricks and Nadine's pretty songs, excepting, of course, Nalla, who was their strongest card.

But they could not wait to rehearse new acts, for they must lose no further time in prosecuting the search for Lydia.

So the performance proved a disappointment, and the takings were very meager indeed. The Mamezan folk, it is true, were mostly poor, and had little money to spare, yet all the same it was with heavy hearts that they bade good-bye to the kind curé and once more took the road.

They were not far beyond the boundaries of the village, for poor old Steady made slow progress with the heavy van, when a man caught hold of his bridle, and made him stop, which indeed he was only too glad to do.

"My children, you go no farther in that direction. I have come for you."

Nadine, Cæsar, and Abel instead of being alarmed at this startling action, joined in an ex-

clamation of surprise and joy, for it was not a highway robber that had thus halted them, but an old acquaintance whom they were delighted to recognize—no other than the kind old constable of Morainville, who had so befriended them at that place.

What could *he* be doing there—nearly a hundred miles away from home?

Divining their astonishment at his appearance the constable made haste to speak.

“You are surprised to see me, no doubt. For eight days have I been following you stage by stage of your journey. I have good news for you.”

“Lydia!” at once cried the three children together. She was their first thought. No matter what their trials might be they seemed as nothing to them in comparison with the loss of Lydia.

But the constable shook his head.

“No—not Lydia yet,” he answered in a lower tone. “We shall find her soon, never fear. But I have come to take you back with me.”

“To take us back with you?” exclaimed Nadine. “What do you mean, my dear constable?”

“Just what I say,” the old man responded, smiling upon her. “It is the order of Madame Pradère. She has sent me for you.”

“Madame Pradère!” echoed Nadine, her own countenance brightening at the mention of the name. “Our kind benefactress! Does she really want us to go to her?”

“To be sure!” returned the constable, who evidently enjoyed his mission. “You don’t know how sorely she has been bereaved since you were at Morainville.”

“Yes—I do,” replied Nadine, softly, her eyes filling with tears. “She lost her husband by a dreadful accident.”

“Ah! She has changed greatly since then,” the constable went on. “Her hair has become almost white. There was a time when they feared for her reason.”

“The poor lady!” murmured Nadine. “How she must have suffered!”

“Yes—ah yes!” sighed the constable. “And she wants to be comforted in her loneliness. She has neither husband nor children now, and so she sent me off to find you, and bring you back. She has resolved to take care of you for the future.”

Nadine and Cæsar looked at one another in bewilderment. What could the constable mean? If they did not know how good and kind he was they might have thought he was out of his

senses. Madame Pradère to adopt them ! Surely it was too good to be true !

But the constable soon convinced them that he was altogether in earnest. Madame Pradère had sent him for them, and they must return with him. He had his orders, and he was bound to carry them out. So, casting away all doubt, they placed themselves under his guidance.

Nalla and Steady were then turned about, and pointed in precisely the opposite direction. That is, they were to proceed due north instead of due south.

It was the constable's first experience of traveling by van, and he took to it very kindly, saying over and over again that it was decidedly a most pleasant means of locomotion.

“ You certainly get a good view of the country, and have time to become well acquainted with it,” was his sagacious comment.

He had ample funds wherewith Madame Pradère had thoughtfully provided him, and the Tambys enjoyed every needed comfort, while the animals were fed as never before.

Under this generous treatment Nalla completely recovered his health, and old Steady positively grew fat, the ribs that had been showing so plainly going quite out of sight.

For a score of days they traveled steadily but slowly, and what between entire relief from all anxiety as to their daily bread, the unwonted abundance of excellent food, and their thoroughly healthy outdoor life in the pleasant company of the genial constable, the three children improved wonderfully in appearance, so that by the time they reached Morainville they were each and all looking their very best.

It was with an amusing yet surely pardonable air of proud satisfaction that the constable conducted them to the Pradère chateau.

He had taken the precaution of informing Madame Pradère in advance of their arrival, and she was ready to receive them with a warm and tender greeting.

Nadine was touched to tears when she saw how the good lady had altered and aged in the short space of time since she parted from her. Her abundant hair was almost snow-white, her beautiful features were deeply lined, and her step had lost all its spring. She moved and spoke softly.

But there was no mistaking her pleasure at the return of the children. Both from the magistrate at Beaulieu, and Father Blandinière she had had letters in regard to them. She knew much of their sufferings, and she was eager to

console them for their trials, and to forget her own sorrows in the endeavor to make them happy.

“ My dear children,” she said after she had embraced them in turn, “ it is because I myself have suffered that I want you, who are still so young, to forget your many tribulations. I once had children of my own. The good God gave them to me. But He took them from me again, and now I want to fill the empty place that they have left. I shall take entire care of you, and shall be responsible for your future. You shall share all that I possess, and be denied nothing that will be for your good. The search for your sister Lydia shall be continued until she is found and restored to you. And now, my dear children, are you content to accept my proposal ? ”

Content to accept her offer—the advantages and attractions of which were so great that they could scarcely credit their understanding of it—? Indeed they were content—and more—they were filled with rapture and gratitude. It meant their admission into a veritable Paradise. No more hunger—no more cold—no more anxiety about food or clothing—no more rough or rascally people to deal with—oh, how good it was of God to give them such a friend !

CHAPTER XXII.

REUNITED AT LAST.

THE days that followed were very happy ones for the Tamby children, and dear kind Madame Pradère found wonderful soothing of her own sorrows in the frank delight they showed at the ease and luxury they now enjoyed.

The Pradère chateau was surrounded by ample grounds in which Nalla was provided with a roomy substantial stable for himself, and through which Cæsar loved to roam accompanied by Vigilant, who evidently quite appreciated being relieved of all rehearsals and public performances.

The old van, that had so long been the only home the children possessed, was put in a corner of the carriage-yard where Abel, who soon found plenty of playmates, had great fun with it, using it now as a house, and again as a fort, and so on after the manner of youngsters with a lively imagination.

At the end of a fortnight Madame Pradère said to the two boys :

“ Now we must see to your education. You must be well fitted for the career that is before you, and so I have arranged that you shall enter the Lycée to-morrow, if you have no objections.”

Both Cæsar and Abel were only too glad to obey. What education they possessed had been given them by their parents, who had done their best under the difficult circumstances of their lives. But it was of course very imperfect and no one realized this more keenly than Cæsar, who had not a lazy bone in his body, and was charged with ambition to be of some account in the world, while Abel was inspired by his big brother, whom he fairly worshiped.

Nadine would remain by the side of Madame Pradère, who desired no better companion than the charming girl with her gentle ways, sweet voice, quick intelligence, and tender heart, whose one thought was to bring sunshine into the shadowed heart of her benefactress.

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Ten years have come and gone, and many things have happened, the recital of which would fill another book, so that of course it cannot be given here. Suffice it to say that they were years full

of happiness for the Tambys, and of proud satisfaction for Madame Pradère, who every day found cause to congratulate herself upon having taken them into her home and heart.

Nadine, now twenty-six years of age, had grown into a beautiful woman with a grace and dignity of manner and sincerity of heart that rendered her inexpressibly charming. She was devoted to Madame Pradère, who regarded her just as if she were her own daughter, placing absolute confidence in her, and giving her every advantage that wealth and culture could procure.

In no part of her duties as Madame's lieutenant did Nadine take more delight than in ministering to the poor and suffering. Her own early experience had taught her the miseries of poverty and sickness, and she was indefatigable in doing good, so that all Morainville esteemed and loved her as they did Madame Pradère.

Cæsar for a time gave his sister and his patroness considerable concern. He did not take kindly to book-learning, and made a poor showing at the Lycée, the truth of the matter being that he was possessed by a passion for a quite different kind of study. His ambition was to be a singer.

As he grew older his voice, so strong and sweet in boyhood, had developed into a singularly fine

tenor, and, having a quick and true ear, as well as the gift of dramatic expression, he was in great demand among Madame Pradère's friends, who made a great deal of him.

At first both Nadine and Madame Pradère were opposed to his adopting singing as a career. They would have preferred some more ordinary profession, but when they saw that Cæsar's heart was set upon it, and that he would never be content at anything else, they gave way, and he was sent to the Conservatory, whence in due time he graduated with the medal of honor.

It is now late in December, and they are all at the chateau except Cæsar, who has just made his début in opera at Paris, and scored a grand success. The journals were unanimous in their praise, and in acclaiming the appearance of a new tenor of the first quality for whom they confidently predicted a brilliant career. Madame Pradère, and Nadine have been thrilled with pride and joy over the triumph of their loved one, and there is no longer any question as to the wisdom of his choice of a profession. Cæsar having thus justified himself in the fullest measure, is returning to the chateau for a short holiday, and his coming is eagerly awaited.

The chateau was ablaze with lights, and stirring

with bustle, for Madame Françoise, the sharp-tongued housekeeper, who was nevertheless the most faithful of servants, was sparing no pains to make Cæsar's reception as brilliant as possible.

Nadine, her countenance radiant, and her eyes aglow, looked more than usually lovely, while Abel, a comely lad now nearing his majority, presented a fine appearance in his cadet uniform.

Vigilant was still alive, although very feeble. He was wholly blind, and almost deaf, and never ventured outside the inclosure of the chateau. Nevertheless when feeling in good spirits, and on being taken notice of, he would make an effort at remembering his accomplishments, and do his best to stand upon his hind legs, and salute with his fore-paws as of old. But he was very tottery in his doing of it.

Out in the park Nalla lived a life of luxurious leisure. Being only a little over sixty years of age he was, for an elephant, still in the heyday of youth, and enjoyed himself immensely, having plenty of room to roam around, abundant food of the best quality, and a spacious lodge into which to retire if the weather was inclement.

Nadine never failed to pay him a daily visit, and, catching sight of her at a distance, he would

trumpet joyfully, making the welkin ring with raucous exclamations.

Poor old Steady had long ago lain down never to rise again, dying contentedly of old age after his life of toil and trouble.

In good time Cæsar arrived. He had grown into a very handsome man. With his father's stalwart shapely figure, and his mother's regular features, and fine brown eyes, he had inherited many of the good qualities of both parents. Through all his experiences of the world and its temptations he had remained a frank, fearless, unsullied boy who loved his sister Nadine to the point of adoration, and regarded Madame Pradère as the best and kindest of friends to whom he could never be sufficiently grateful.

The reunion was an inexpressibly happy one. The young people had a thousand things to tell each other, and as they chatted away like magpies, Madame Pradère watching them with tear-dimmed eyes, but swelling heart, murmured softly :

“The good God bless them ! They are the sunshine of my life.”

At breakfast the following morning Cæsar surprised her by asking permission to take Nadine away with him for a few days.

“Where do you wish to take her, Cæsar?”
Madame Pradère inquired.

“I want to fulfill a vow that I made the day I entered the Conservatory,” answered Cæsar, and on his explaining what the vow was, Madame at once said :

“I heartily approve, Cæsar. It will be a lovely thing to do, and not only shall Nadine and Abel accompany you, but I shall also go with you.”

Two days later Madame and the three young people took the midday train at the railway station, it being the twenty-third of December.

Where were they going—and how was it that Madame Pradère, who had not gone out since her husband’s death, went with them?

These were the questions that set Morainville agog, but the secret was well kept, and no one could answer them, save with a mere guess.

Their destination was the little village of Mamezan, which they now revisited after an absence of ten years, and in which they found little change, except that there were many more crosses in the cemetery beside the shabby old church.

Good Father Blandinière was still in charge, but the venerable priest was very frail, being

over eighty years of age, the oldest curé and the most beloved in the whole country.

Night had come, and with it the snow. From the windows of the Mamezan houses the light streamed out upon the ill-kept sidewalks, which as it drew towards midnight began to be crowded with the villagers clattering noisily in their wooden sabots.

They were all going in the one direction, that is, churchward, for the Christmas midnight Mass was about to be celebrated.

The little edifice was crowded by reverent worshipers, but who were the strange ladies in such rich attire, and the strapping young fellow in the rich uniform ?

Nobody knew, although every one tried hard to get a good look at them, and to see if they could not recognize them.

Presently the little bell tinkled, and the aged priest slowly descended the altar steps. He seemed very feeble, and his long hair, white as the snow outside, lay upon his shoulders. With trembling hands he elevated the Host while the congregation kneeled, and the bell once more tinkled.

At that moment the clear, sweet notes of a mandolin floated down from the little gallery over the entrance, and then a superb tenor voice,

of wonderful power and expression, began the beautiful *Cantique de Noel* :

“ Tout bruit s’éteint, le soir s’achève
Dans un silence triomphant ;
L’enfant cède à l’heure du rêve
Et le rêve berce l’enfant,
Noel ! Noel ! ”

All sounds are hushed, for night has come
In silence earth unfolding ;
The children far through dreamland roam
Rare joys in sleep beholding.
Noel ! Noel !

At the first notes, the old priest instinctively turned towards his flock. It was the same chant that ten years before had been sung by the young mountebank. But the voice was not that of the boy, although the playing of the mandolin was surely the same.

With brimming eyes and fluttering heart the old man listened as though spell-bound. Never before had such glorious music filled his obscure little church. It was as though an angel sang.

When the service concluded, Madame Pradère and the Tambys remained to exchange greetings with Father Blandinière. The venerable curé was so deeply moved that he found difficulty in speaking. He embraced Nadine, and Cæsar, and

Abel, affectionately, murmuring, in a scarcely audible voice :

“ My dear children ! My dear children ! It is good of God to permit me to see you again, and all so happy ! ”

The travelers had arranged to leave for home on the following evening, but they were told that a traveling circus was to give a great performance that evening, and Cæsar begged Madame Pradère to remain over, as he was anxious to be present.

“ It will remind us,” he said to Nadine, “ of the poor little representation that we gave here ten years ago, when we were in such hard luck.”

Madame Pradère readily consented, and in the evening they all went to the circus, which they found crowded to its utmost capacity.

The performance was a very good one of its kind. There were expert acrobats, tumblers, tight-rope walkers, bare-back riders, and several highly-amusing clowns. One clown, called “ Mossieu Frisch,” was particularly diverting with his jokes and antics. Cæsar, looking at him closely, was suddenly impressed with the idea that he had seen him before. But when, and where ? His recollection was confused. He could neither identify nor locate the funny fellow.

Presently the attendants began to place hurdles about the ring, and to bring in large hoops covered with parti-colored paper. Then Mossieu Frisch announced with a great flourish that the world-renowned equestrienne, Mademoiselle Rosalba, would perform her thrilling feats. At the same moment a superb snow-white horse, having on its back a broad pad covered with satin and spangles, galloped into the ring, followed by a pretty girl in circus costume, who leaped lightly to the pad.

The instant she appeared there rang out above the music of the band a threefold cry of

“ Lydia ! Lydia ! Lydia ! ”

The equestrienne sprang to the ground, stood for a moment as if she doubted what eyes and ears were telling her, and then, darting across the ring, threw herself into the outstretched arms of Nadine and Cæsar and Abel, that encircled her so as almost to hide her from sight.

For it was Lydia—their own darling sister—so long lost, and now by kind Providence restored to them.

A scene of great excitement ensued. The spectators marveled what it all meant, and whether it was some novel feature of the performance. The performance was of course sus-

pended, and presently the ubiquitous gendarmes appeared to make inquiry.

Cæsar called upon them to arrest Mossieu Frisch, whom he felt sure had been responsible for Lydia's abduction, and they at once laid hands upon him, and took him off to prison. He was indeed the very man who had put his van in place of theirs at Beaulieu, and had afterwards so startled Nadine by peeping in through the window when they were reckoning up their receipts.

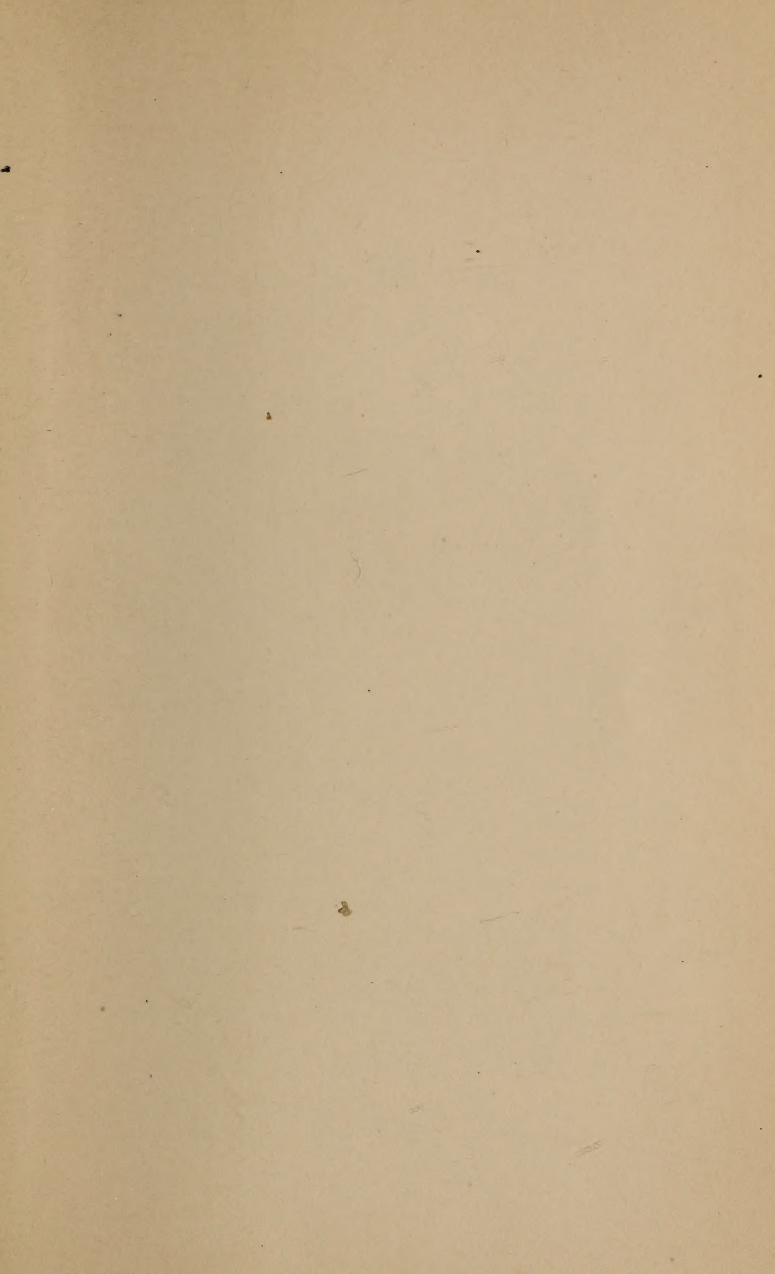
It appeared that the circus had but recently returned to France after many years traveling through Italy and Germany, and that was why all efforts to trace and rescue Lydia had been in vain.

So—all's well that ends well. Lydia, despite her hard life with the circus, had grown into a very attractive girl, little spoiled by her surroundings. Madame Pradère's party had but four members when it left Morainville, but five when it returned. The kind-hearted lady was only too delighted to have one more child to mother, and the Tambys rejoiced beyond description at the restoration of the sister about whose absence they had never ceased to grieve.

The future stretched before them with every

promise of happiness. They had had their hard times, and their bitter griefs, and had borne them bravely. Now through a beneficent Providence these were all over and past. And richly they deserved their good fortune, for, amid all their vicissitudes had they not kept their lives pure, and their hearts simple?

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